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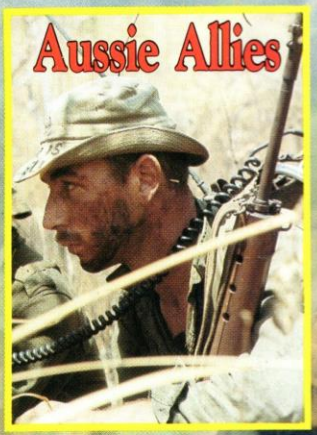

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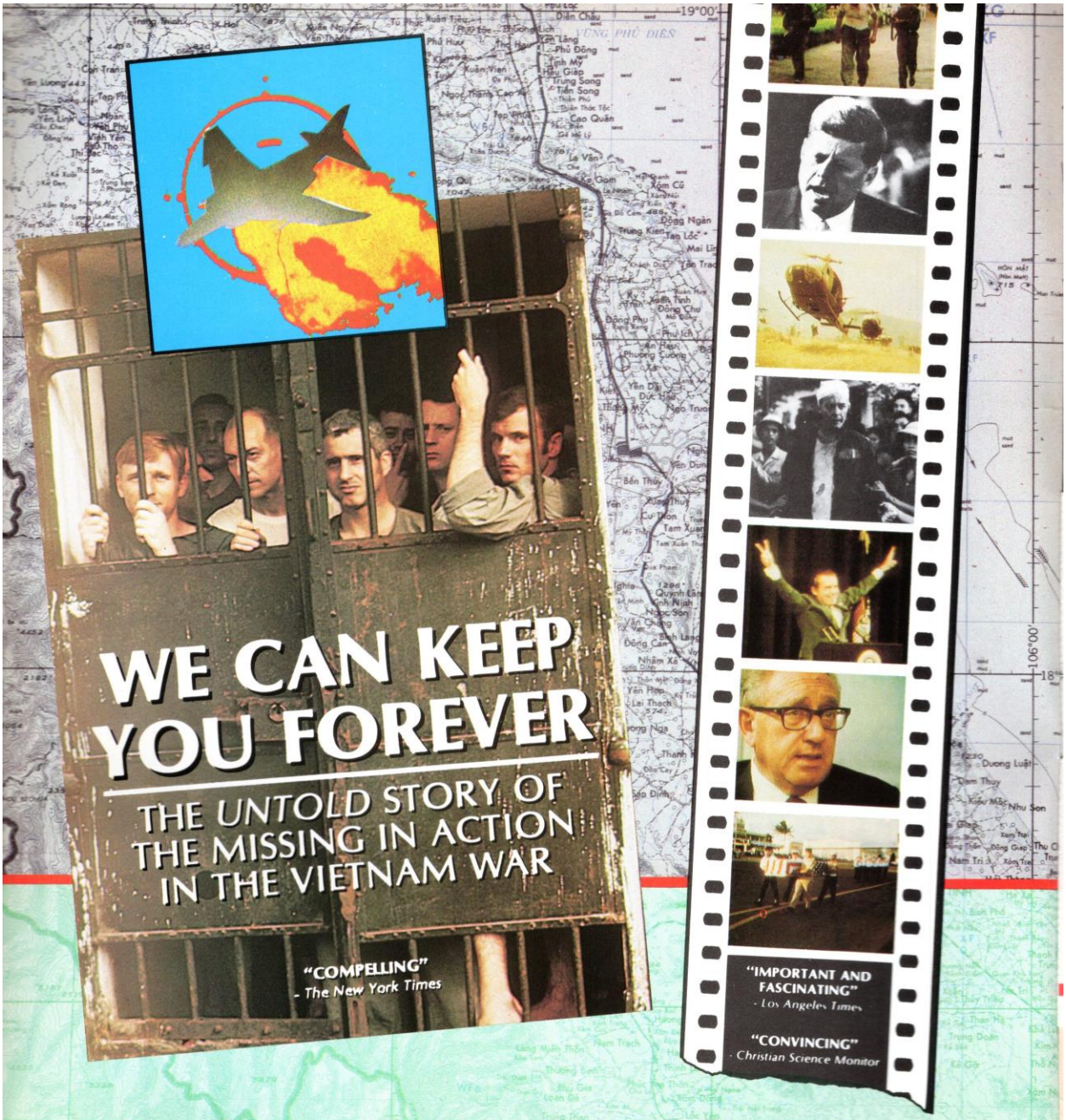

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VIETNAM

6 EDITORIAL

8 PERSONALITY
Dickey Chapelle's lifelong quest was to always be where the action was, Vietnam included.
By Elizabeth Deakman

10 FIGHTING FORCES
1965 would be the opening chapter for a newly formed VC regiment, the 273rd.
By Shelby L. Stanton

12 BASES & INSTALLATIONS
At Cu Chi, paved streets lined the once remote rest and refit grounds of the Viet Cong.
By Shelby L. Stanton

50 ARSENAL
The one-two punch provided by the Quad and Duster was an adaptation left over from World War II.
By Charles E. Kirkpatrick

58 BOOK REVIEWS
Time provides fresh perspective on the "other war" in Vietnam—the American advisory effort from start to finish.
By Alexander S. Cochran, Jr.

18 ALLIES FROM DOWN UNDER
By John Brown
Their numbers may have been small, but the Aussie advisers in Vietnam were on hand for 10 years—and for many a tough combat operation.

26 TROUBLED APOSTLE OF VICTORY
Interview by Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr.
John Paul Vann, military man and civilian adviser, was a legendary figure as contradictory as the war itself.

34 WAR'S BITTER FINALE
By Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr.
In the confusion and panic came moments of honor, others of seeming betrayal. Heroes and innocents were left behind.

42 DOUBLE AMBUSH ON ROUTE 13
By John M. Carland
Not one, but two ambushes would greet the deploying armored cavalry of the U.S. 1st Infantry in a test of strength along National Route 13.

COVER: As "eyes and ears," the Blue Rifle Platoon, Troop B, 1st Sqdn., 9th Cav. Regt., 1st Cavalry Division, moves through elephant grass on a combat assault mission in the An Lao Valley during Operation Pershing, July 28, 1967. LEFT: Viet Cong tactics and courage were an unpleasant surprise at the Battle of Ap Bac (Interview, P. 26). Later, they were bolstered with Soviet weapons and North Vietnamese troops to form new units like the 273rd Regiment (Story, P. 10). MIDDLE: The 273rd was one of three VC regiments that tested their ambush techniques against American armor and firepower along Route 13 in 1966 (Story, P. 42). RIGHT: Australians can count many a tough campaign in their battle record: Gallipoli, North Africa, New Guinea, Malaya, Korea . . . and Vietnam (Story, P. 18).

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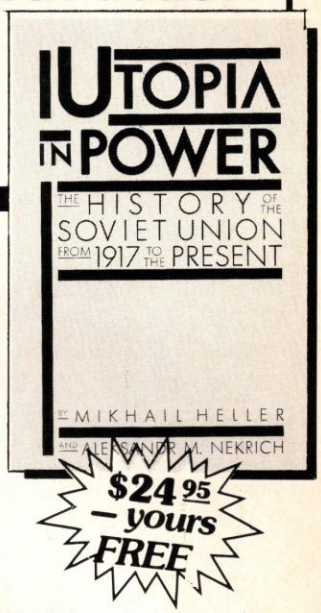

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Our readers keep us honest—and provide the articles and first-hand accounts on what the Vietnam War really was.

One of the many functions of our Editorial Review Board, as we discussed in an earlier issue, is to represent the diversity of the Vietnam experience, and to that end we recently added Army Maj. Gen. Charles Hines, a Vietnam veteran who served there as a military police captain during the war; and retired Air Force Colonel Jacksel M. Broughton, who flew F-105 "Thuds" over North Vietnam.

Another of the Board's functions is to ensure that we do not make any obvious or dumb mistakes.

Who cares that the man on the phone is 2Lt. Edward Ridgley, 9th Infantry Division? Ridgley might. . .and he, or someone who knows him, may be a reader.

But since we began publication less than a year ago, we have found that the members of the Editorial Board are not the only ones to keep the magazine honest. Our readers serve that purpose, as well. They range from veterans and their families who have personal knowledge of what the war was all about, to military buffs who are expert on armaments, weaponry and equipment, to others such as a cadet at the Air Force Academy who recently took us to task for several minor errors in our Fall 1988 edition.

In our Slavich interview, Robert Mason's book, *Chicken Hawk*, was referred to as *The Chickenhawks* (but identified properly in the book review section), and author W.E.B. Griffin was misidentified as W.R. Griffin. Another reader complained about the use of the title "Specialist Fourth Class" instead of "Specialist Four" (but this is a matter of timing, since the original title *was* "Specialist Fourth Class" and was only later changed to "Specialist Four") and about calling the Medal of Honor by its common (but incorrect) title of the "Congressional" Medal of Honor.

Also in the Fall 1988 issue, a Vietnamese scholar questioned whether General Giap and former South Vietnamese President Ngo Dihn Diem were indeed classmates at the Lycee National in Hue, pointing out correctly that Giap was 11 years younger than Diem. Instead of "classmates" we should have said "fellow alumnus." Yet another reader wrote to point out that the 555th "Red Horse" Air Force Construction Squadron (of which he was a member) built about one-third of the buildings at Cam Ranh bay.

Several readers questioned the caption on the photo illustrating the article on Tan Son Nhut Airbase in our Summer 1988 edition. They felt that those shown defending the base during the Tet offensive were Air Force Security Police rather than Army infantrymen. They could be right (both took part in the base defenses), but the picture is too unclear to tell. Certainly there was no attempt to minimize the role that the Air Force Security Police played in defending our air bases in Vietnam.

The article on Kham Duc also drew reader comment. One was from the family of a soldier from the 196th Light Infantry Brigade who they believe was taken prisoner there and who is still missing in action. Another was from a former Army Specialist Four (now an Air Force Reserve Technical Sergeant) who took part in the operation as a member of the 178th Assault Support Helicopter Company. Finally there was a letter from a war correspondent who went back to Kham Duc in July 1970 with elements of the ARVN 2nd Division and found a ghost town with everything still intact.

The cover title "Rolling Thunder" on our Fall 1988 edition also came in for criticism. It should have read "Arc Light," since the article was concerned primarily with B-52 bomber operations within South Vietnam.

Most of our mail, however, has to do with submission of poems, articles and other material for publication in the magazine. A number, believing that *Vietnam* is a veteran's magazine, have asked about adding a locator file section, and others have sent in accounts of what happened to veterans after they returned from Vietnam.

Because we are concerned with factual accounts, the magazine does not publish fictional tales of Vietnam service. And it does not publish poetry. We have received many quite moving poems about Vietnam, but unfortunately all have had to be returned.

But we do encourage free-lance stories from our readers. Those who wish to write for *Vietnam* Magazine should do three things. First, they should note carefully how the magazine is structured (i.e., departments on personalities, fighting forces, bases and installations, the Vietnam arsenal, and longer articles on battles and the like). Then they should take notice of the style in which the articles are written. Generally third-person accounts are preferred (i.e., not "There I was" but "There the xxxxth Infantry was"). Then they should write for a copy of our Writers Guidelines, which we will be most happy to provide.

One thing we do need are photographs and combat art. Those who have such material should contact Susan Winn, our Pictorial Research Director, here at the magazine. She can tell you how your material can be put to good use.

H.G.S.

VIETNAM

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 4

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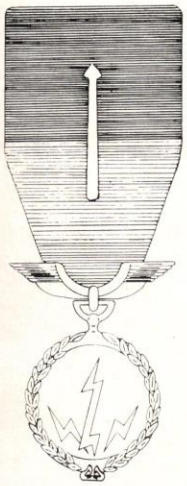

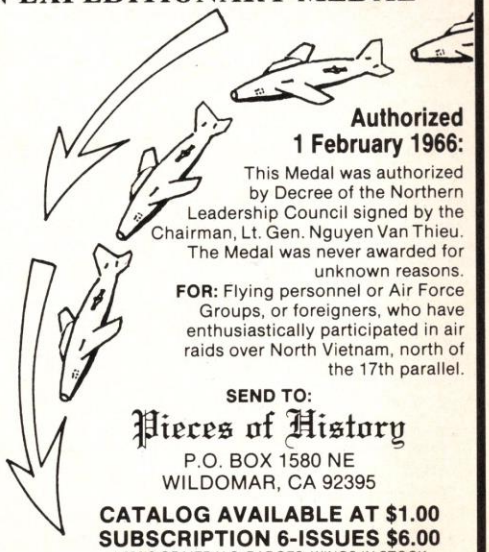

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Dickey Chapelle's lifelong quest was to be where "her" Marines and the action were—Vietnam included.

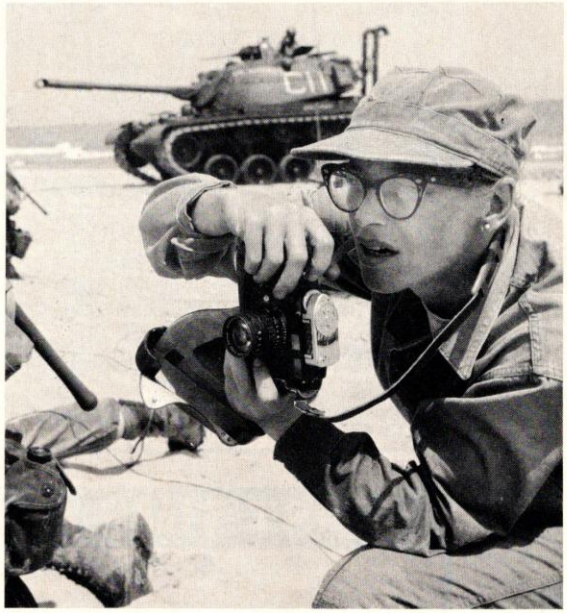
By Elizabeth Deakman

Dickey Chapelle, war correspondent and photographer, was killed by a booby trap near DaNang, on patrol with "her Marines," November 4, 1965. Behind her were 23 years of "bayonet border" reporting. She was the first American woman journalist ever killed in action.

People in affluent, conservative Shorewood, Wisc., shook their heads in disbelief that a nice, smart girl like Georgette Louise Meyer, one of their own, should come to such an end—and so young, only 46.

No quirk of fate, Vietnam was the natural denouement of Chapelle's remarkable lifetime of 1919-1965. In those years, there were few wars or rebel actions that she did not cover.

She was born in Milwaukee the year that saw Ho Chi Minh in Paris joining the French Socialist Party and, soon after that, co-founding the Communist Party of France. The newspaper he edited found its way back to Indochina.



Objective journalism was not Dickey Chapelle's strong point; her involvement and commitment in America's conflicts were emotional, physical and total. Where the Marines went, she went.

Even Dickey Chapelle's childhood presaged an adult who would abandon the commonly accepted female stereotype. Georgette Louise became Dickey through a Grandmother's loving diminutive. It occasionally would serve her well as a male name, however deceptive.

Dickey's pudgy frame, her taste for plain boyish dress and her superior intellect made her the butt both of jokes and envy among her peers in school. Ignoring all that, she took extra classes and graduated from the Shorewood High school at age 16 with the "highest average ever attained there," according to the school newspaper. Her teachers recommended her for an MIT scholarship in aeronautical engineering, and in spite of her mother's worries she was off to Massachusetts to compete in the big-time world of nearly-all-male Eastern intellectualism.

It didn't work out. She found it more interesting and profitable to visit Navy and Coast Guard facilities to sell stories for a Boston newspaper. The Depression soon meant there was no money from home. Chapelle lost her scholarship and never finished college.

Americans paid little attention then to Indochina, where the French were trying to strengthen their power with social reforms. Domestic unemployment and the Nazi menace looming in Europe absorbed the American press.

Back in Milwaukee, Dickey's family thought to keep her out of trouble by sending her to Miami to live wih her retired grandparents.

Writing stories about air shows, she discovered that she could be "in" aviation in spite of myopic eyes. In no time at all she landed a job in New York doing press releases for Transworld Airlines. She also met Tony Chapelle, teacher of photography.

At 21, she married this savvy New Yorker twice her age. It was a shock to the family—not the first, nor the last.

Tony was a U.S. Navy veteran of World War I, and when Pearl Harbor brought World War II to America, he volunteered. His assignment to teach photography in the Panama Canal Zone took his wife Dickey to her first military reporting job. Determined to go with him, she got an assignment to cover U.S. Army jungle training for *Look* Magazine.

Her required application for War Department accreditation met the standard reply—no facilities for women. But young Dickey Chapelle told the officer discouraging her that she figured the U.S. 14th Regiment had faced tougher problems, and it could probably solve this one. She got to the Canal Zone and was with Tony until she exploded a flash bulb in the face of visiting Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. Suddenly her presence became known, and while the Navy could do nothing about her, it could send Tony home.

Back in New York, Tony first went to work for the Army Pictorial Center. Then he was assigned to Chungking, China, for propaganda work. Tony's orders were canceled, and wife Dickey, working for Fawcett Publications, was soon aboard a Naval aircraft flying from Pearl Harbor to Navy headquarters on Guam. It was March 15, 1945.

At Guam, Colonel H.B. Miller, a public relations officer, had authorized women correspondents to come only that far. Chapelle, her slight frame draped in khaki pants and shirt, became a fixture in Colonel Miller's office, persistent in her belief that any stone could be worn. She always asked, politely, to go "as far forward as you will let me." Finally, Colonel Miller agreed to put her on the

Continued on page 61

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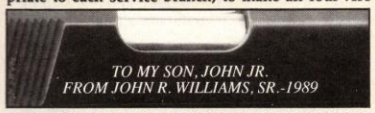

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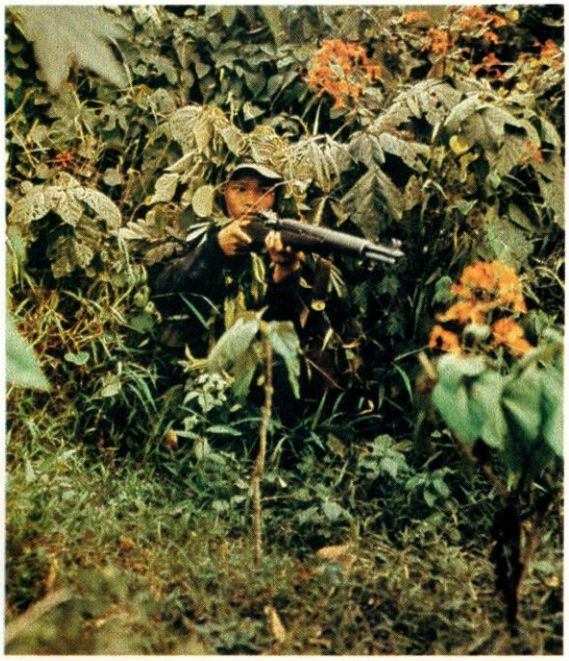
The year 1965 would be the opening chapter for a newly formed Viet Cong regiment, the 273rd.

By Shelby L. Stanton

When the Communist Central Command in South Vietnam made the decision to activate a new regimental-sized combat unit, the 273rd VC Regiment, in early 1964, the decision marked a new phase in Communist plans to seize control of South Vietnam. The VC were tired of using local village forces, with primitive explosives and antiquated weapons, in their attempt to overthrow the government.

As part of a much bolder strategy, the 273rd VC Regiment was raised to be part of the 9th VC Division, a powerful new infantry formation capable of confronting the main South Vietnamese Army on the open battlefield. The formation of the division and its regiments was a radical decision destined to change the entire nature of the Communist internal revolution against the Saigon regime.



After years of fighting by resourcefulness alone, the Viet Cong T80 Battalion became the nucleus of a new VC regiment, the 273rd, with new weapons, and new North Vietnamese personnel.

Throughout July and August 1964, the 273rd VC Regiment began actively forming near the Cambodian border, where modern assault rifles and ammunition could be received from Communist supply sources across the border. This chain of supply enabled the regiment to receive, from the start, advanced Sino-Soviet arms that arrived through supposedly "neutral" Cambodian ports.

The 273rd VC Regiment was not a collection of peasants rounded up from the rice fields, garbed in black farming apparel and armed with bottle bombs, stolen World War II-era rifles and home-made grenades. The 273rd VC Regiment was a fully trained, modern tactical formation led by experienced infantry combat experts fresh from North Vietnam and by proven guerrilla commanders. Regimental soldiers were clothed in standard khaki-green uniforms with full web gear. They were equipped with the latest ammunition and weapons from Soviet and Chinese factories. The men carried AK-47 rifles capable of full automatic firing. Individual equipment included sacks stuffed with Chinese-manufactured grenades and chest-mounted ammunition pouches full of Russian-supplied rifle magazines. Many elements had heavy machine guns, towed artillery, rocket-propelled grenades and sophisticated demolition devices.

The first two battalions, the T80 and T70 Battalions, arrived in Tay Ninh Province during July and August 1964. They were joined by a third battalion, the 263rd Dong Thap Battalion, during December. At that time these three battalions were redesignated as the 7th, 8th and 9th Battalions of the 273rd VC Regiment respectively. The regiment contained those three infantry battalions, plus one artillery battalion (10th), and nine separate "K-series" companies. These were the K16 Sapper Company, the K17 Assault Infantry Company, the K18 Anti-Aircraft Machine Gun Company, the K19 Engineer Company, the K20 Signal Company, the K21 Reconnaissance Company, the K22 Transportation Company, the K23 Medical Company, and the K24 Convalescent Company. The regiment was now fully assembled and ready to fight according to conventional warfare doctrine.

On December 22, 1964, the 273rd VC Regiment was formally activated in the northern Boi Loi Woods under the command of Colonel Chin Hien, who later was reassigned to the Communist High Command (spring of 1966). It was clear from the outset that this regiment was controlled by the North Vietnamese and supplied with foreign arms from around the globe. The fiction of this regiment being merely a South Vietnamese guerrilla peasant force was maintained, however, to fool Saigon military analysts.

For the Allies in the field, the origin of the newly detected regimental battalions was difficult to trace at first. They discovered that the 7th Battalion of the 273rd VC Regiment actually originated from the old T80 Battalion. This organization dated back to 1959, when it was raised in the Mekong Delta and known simply as the 80th Viet Cong Battalion. Later this battalion switched titles and became the 96th Battalion. In 1962, the battalion was relabeled as the T80 Battalion, probably in honor of its original title. By this time, it was fighting in the thick U Minh Forest along the western coast of the lowermost Mekong Delta.

The T70 Battalion was formed in 1962 by taking troops from the older T80 battalion and using them to form another Viet Cong unit just south of the U Minh

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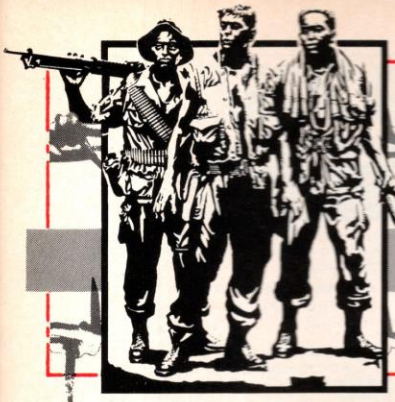

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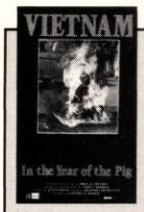

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At Cu Chi, paved streets lined the once remote rest and refit grounds of the Viet Cong.

By Shelby L. Stanton

In the fall of 1968, an Allied convoy was ambushed while traveling through a rubber plantation near Cu Chi, South Vietnam. Heavy mortar fire barraged the vehicles, sending geysers of dirt exploding down the roadway. As trucks and jeeps careened through the smoke, the Viet Cong opened up with heavy recoilless rifles. Trucks began to burn while enemy machine guns clattered. As rocket-propelled grenades scored numerous direct hits, the entire convoy obviously was in serious trouble.

Within moments, however, the transportation crews and their military police guardians responded with the trained precision of combat veterans. Braving the hail of bullets, wounded drivers drove their damaged vehicles off the road to keep the highway clear for armored reinforcements. In cases where drivers were dead behind the wheels of their stalled trucks, others gallantly leaped into the cabs and restarted the stalled trucks, driving them to safety beyond the ambush zone.

Cu Chi served the 25th Infantry Division above the abandoned tunnels of the Viet Cong. The base itself was relatively safe, but the road in and out never was.

Military police armored cars roared into action with their own machine guns blazing at the tree line. Tanks left their pre-positioned areas along the highway and started for the battle area. Observation helicopters buzzed over the tree tops as their co-pilots radioed for aviation and artillery support and described targets. As the last trucks still able to move cleared the killing zone, gunships and armed helicopters arrived to strafe and rocket the rubber plantation.

The battle was soon over. Several demolished trucks littered the roadway, but Allied troops counted 73 enemy bodies in the smashed vegetation nearby. Several weapons were left behind, and blood trails led into the deeper woods, signifying the probability of higher casualties. The threat of enemy action at another time or place along the highway persisted, however, for this was just one incident in a persistent Viet Cong campaign against a very important American target: Cu Chi.

Cu Chi was one of the largest U.S. Army base camps in Vietnam and the the home of the 25th Infantry Division ("Tropic Lightning") during the Vietnam War. The camp was located northwest of Saigon, close to the North Vietnamese-Viet Cong bastion of War Zone C. Although Cu Chi was located in a very wide area cleared by bulldozers and other heavy engineer equipment, its deliberate placement in the heart of enemy-controlled countryside made it one of the most danger-prone major installations during the war.

The base was supplied largely by motor convoys, and attacking these convoys was just one way in which the Viet Cong tried to hamper Army operations in the Cu Chi area.

When the 25th Infantry Division was alerted to leave Hawaii and deploy to Vietnam, the commander was informed of the formation's projected area of operations and told to select a wartime base camp. As the division commander conferred with his engineers, intelligence analysts and operations experts, carefully reviewing secret maps, all were looking for a good area offering terrain defensibility and water supply. An area near the Vietnamese town of Cu Chi was tentatively chosen as the best alternative, even though they knew it was in the heart of enemy country.

A base development committee under Brig. Gen. Edward H. de Saussure was flown into the Cu Chi vicinity. The party made the final choice on an exact location after carefully checking the land and adjacent villages. Infantry and mechanized forces then moved into the fields and began battling the enemy for possession of the ground. The fighting was often heavy and often involved tunnel-clearing operations, since the 25th Infantry Division had chosen a major Viet Cong rest area and supply base as the division's future home. The enemy was very familiar with the area and used their intricate web of tunnels to harass and delay engineering and clearing parties.

The American pressure to consolidate control was intense, however, and soon the Viet Cong decided to retreat to safer territory. This was in line with Communist tactics, because in guerrilla warfare it is more important to keep one's units viable than to waste them in open, pitched battles for fixed positions. As soon as the area was relatively safe for American construction crews and support troops, they laid out road and wire systems. Engineers with bulldozers and like heavy machinery began to clear fields of fire and to erect defensive barriers. During this opening stage of construction, the Viet Cong periodically returned—often through their hidden labyrinth of tunnels—and mounted local attacks or set up sniper positions.

In the meantime, the main portion of

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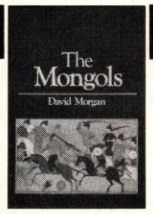

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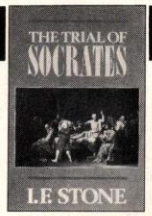

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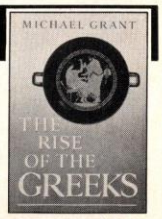

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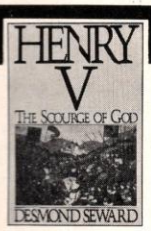

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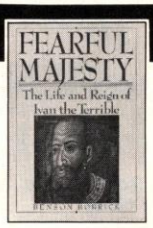

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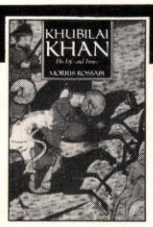

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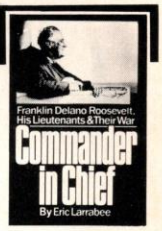

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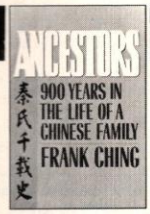

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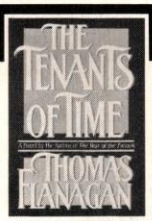

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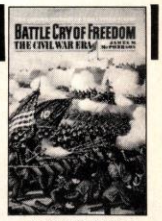

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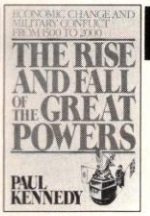

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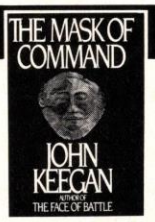

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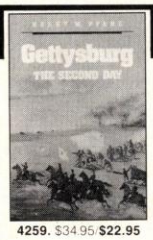

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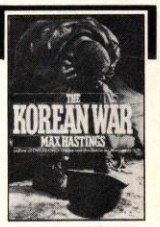

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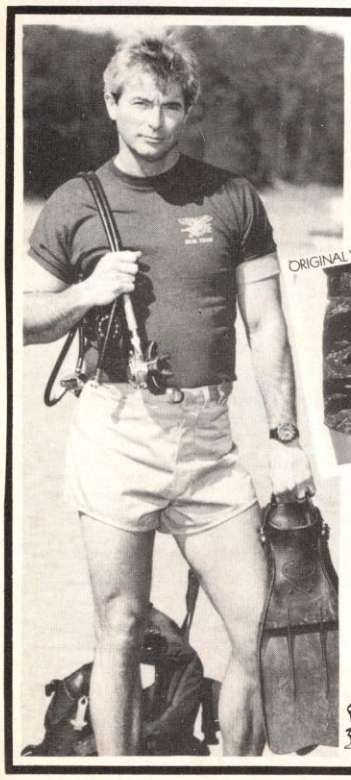

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the 25th Infantry Division prepared to leave Hawaii and sail to Vietnam. Before they left, the troops were given tents and folding cots and building materials for the new base. Units received prepackaged lumber and other necessities in order to rapidly assemble their new field camp—even latrine kits. In addition to supplies for living quarters, the division took many items that would be scarce in Vietnam. These included essential electrical components such as refrigerators and generators, but many "comfort" items were also loaded, among them a giant ice machine plant for manufacturing ice cream.

Once the division's main elements landed in Vietnam, they were trucked and flown into Cu Chi. The construction of the base camp began in earnest. The pre-assignment of living and working areas helped the division to settle in quickly. The area blossomed with tents and temporary structures as 15,000 men worked day and night with shovels, hammers and other tools. Cement was poured, cranes swung metal hut frames into place, and scores of men strained under the weight of timbers being erected. From the air, Cu Chi sprang up like a small city. Within weeks, the jungle was replaced by a maze of roadways, troop facilities, maintenance shops, airfields, motor pools, helicopter pads, hospitals, support offices, storage points, ammunition depots, artillery positions and headquarters buildings.

The 25th Infantry Division was keenly aware that the Viet Cong might launch a major assault to overrun Cu Chi and retake the area—the capture of Cu Chi would have been a major enemy victory. To prevent this from happening, the division surrounded its base with a sophisticated "bunker line." This network of fighting positions and reinforced bunkers was interspersed with a series of observation towers sporting heavy machine guns and powerful searchlights, rows of barbed wire and complex fences with additional lighting, and extensive mine fields in front of earthen berms. Sensors and counter-mortar radar devices were used to maintain continual surveillance and to discourage infiltration tactics by VC sappers.

The bunker line ringing the camp was defended by various 25th Infantry Division units, which were assigned different sections on a standard basis. The American defenders were given detailed instructions in case of attack and rehearsed their battle plans constantly. Artillery howitzers and cannon within the main camp remained on ready alert. Jeep patrols and infantry ambush teams monitored the no-man's land beyond the bunker line to keep potential enemy scouts at a safe distance.

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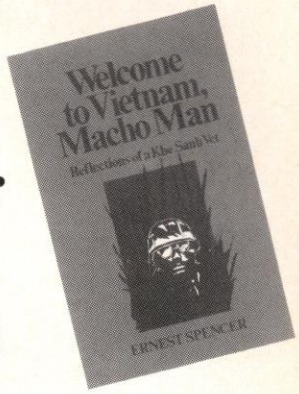

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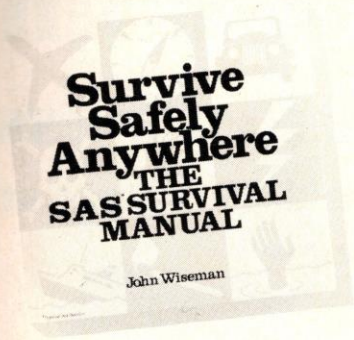

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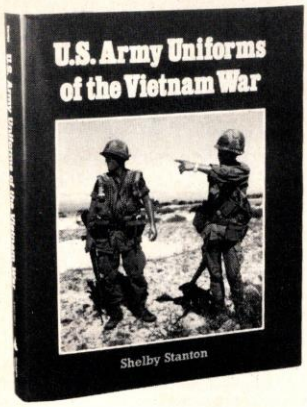

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As the combat home of the 25th Infantry Division, Cu Chi served double duty—as both a forward staging post and a relatively secure, rear base area. The primary purpose of Cu Chi was to give the division a platform to mount major airmobile, mechanized and infantry operations into the surrounding countryside. Additionally, the base served as a rest and training center. Soldiers returning from the field were housed at Cu Chi in tents and wooden barracks while they cleaned weapons, relaxed between operations and prepared to go back out into the field. Many soldiers of the division and its supporting units worked at Cu Chi fulltime and rarely left the base.

Throughout the war, Cu Chi was such an exposed American outpost that it remained a top-priority Viet Cong target. Most Viet Cong efforts to hamper Cu Chi operations aimed at doing damage without taking heavy losses in return. For this reason, actual frontal attacks against the main post were extremely rare.

Instead, one of the most common Viet Cong tactics was to stage an ambush on the major roads and highways used to resupply the base. This strategy was especially lucrative because the 1st Logistical Command and 25th Supply and Transport Battalion usually sent four daily truck convoys, averaging 70 vehicles each, into Cu Chi. These long motor columns picked up supplies at the warehouses and depots in Saigon and Long Binh and then had to travel along open roads to reach their destination.

The Viet Cong campaign against the ground supply routes leading into Cu Chi never seriously threatened the base, but it did cause inconvenience and high cumulative losses. The division concentrated its efforts to make travel as safe as possible by placing mutually supporting artillery in range of the roads. Tanks and mechanized vehicles, such as armored personnel carriers, periodically made sweeps, but were vulnerable to mines. This threat forced the division to employ frequent infantry search and clear operations and foot patrols. The soldiers carefully probed the roads with minesweepers, checked the rice fields and moved in platoon lines through the clumps of jungle around the roads. As an extra security precaution, permanent checkpoints and armed stations were posted at bridges and known danger points.

Continued convoy attacks forced the 25th Infantry Division to adopt new convoy tactics during 1968. The trucks carrying fuel and ammunition were always kept in the rear of any convoys. In this manner they would not block the rest of the convoy if they were destroyed.

Wreckers and crane vehicles were added, and the military police received more armored cars and gun-trucks to protect them. Gunships and command helicopters flew above each convoy to monitor potential ambush sites and watch suspicious activity below. Finally, Rome Plow "dozers" cleared out large swaths of land to each side of the roads to deprive the enemy of potential hiding places. These measures never completely stopped the convoy ambushes, but it became increasingly costly for the enemy to initiate attacks on major truck columns.

Nearly unique among U.S. Army base camps in Vietnam was Cu Chi's deliberate location close to a major War Zone and the Cambodian border, a selection made despite the area's previous role as a Viet Cong rest and refitting center. Unknown to the American engineers and logisticians who selected this seemingly innocuous site, its excellent drainage and natural landscape advantages already had been recognized by the Communist insurgent movement. Over the years, a complicated tunnel and underground headquarters system was dug into the earth and manned by some of the most trusted Viet Cong units—far more extensive than at first appeared to the first American arrivals.

The tunnels of Cu Chi, however, never posed the major threat to the base that some writers have claimed. As already noted, once the Americans moved into Cu Chi in force, the Viet Cong decided to abandon the area rather than become involved in a protracted struggle to retain it.

The Viet Cong commanders were smart enough to realize that guerrilla warfare would be unsuccessful in an open contest against superior U.S. tanks, aircraft and mechanized troops. The VC resisted the first intrusions into their territory by the 25th Infantry Division, but once it became clear that the Americans were determined to occupy this particular parcel of ground, the Viet Cong abandoned it. They regrouped in War Zone C or across the Cambodian border and remained outside Cu Chi base camp for the rest of the war.

The tunnels, though, did pose a nasty surprise to the first 25th Infantry Division troops entering the Cu Chi area, but the soldiers still searched most of them out. There were few tunnel engagements because the enemy withdrew. They found it much cheaper and easier to build new tunnel complexes in other areas than to defend their existing system in that one location. The "tunnels of Cu Chi" actually refer to the tunnels away from the base camp. Once the division commanders became aware that

Continued on page 57

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Black, the color for subdued insignia worn with battle dress, is the field upon which Army Green is imposed. Army Green is derived from battle dress. Gold, expressed historically in Army uniform ornamentation and embellishment, is the color of victory and rests upon the Army Green.

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4. USAF:
Air Force Blue on a field of Special Dress Blue represents night and space operational capabilities; stripes of Silver, the color of flight wings, divides the Air Force Blue in representation of the Missing Man formation; above each is represented a single White contrail on a field of deep Sky Blue.

5. U.S. Navy:
Blue and Gold with Dress Blue and White accent. Navy Blue, the field color, represents the sea; the Gold upon it represents victory at sea. Dual dress Blue stripes are the symbols of the depths of seas and space. The slender thread of White is representative of the wakes of ships, boats and torpedoes; the contrails of aircraft and missiles, symbol of U.S. Navy prowess from deep sea to deep space.

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The Scarlet and Gold of the Corps is repeated over a field of Traditional Dress Blue. Scarlet signifies the blood of sacrifice, and surrounds the Gold of victory; symbolic of its cost.

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8. 187th Regiment:
"Ne Desit Virtus" (Let Valor Not Fail)
The Ground is Infantry Standard Blue which surrounds Argent (silver) which is representative of sky and of clouds. Piercing the clouds is a Red sword symbolized by the broad Red line imposed upon the Silver cloud lines. The whole is symbolic of death, destruction and military power from above; together they symbolize the characteristics of Airborne Infantry... (text shortened, complete heraldry with order)

9. 502nd Regiment:
"Strike"
The ground is the blue of Infantry Regimental Standards. The stripe of gold represents the claw of the Eagle from the regimental Coat of Arms, as paired stripes of black with silver represent the Eagle's talons and the silver badge of the Airborne Warrior conjoined; they are token of the Regiment's power to boldly Strike from the sky... (text shortened, complete heraldry with order)

10. 506th Regiment:
"Currahee" (Stands Alone).
The Ground is blue, traditional representation of the Infantry. Green, alone of the ground, represents Currahee (translated from Cherokee) mountain in Georgia where the 506th was activated: it symbolizes the organization's strength and independence, and its ability to stand alone for which paratroops are renowned. The Green, the Red, and the Gold, in sum, symbolize Vietnam service where the Regiment distinguished itself in battle through twelve campaigns... (text shortened, complete with order)

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ALLIES FROM DOWN UNDER

Their numbers may have been small, but the Aussie advisers' contingent in Vietnam was on hand for 10 years—and for many a tough combat operation.

By John Brown

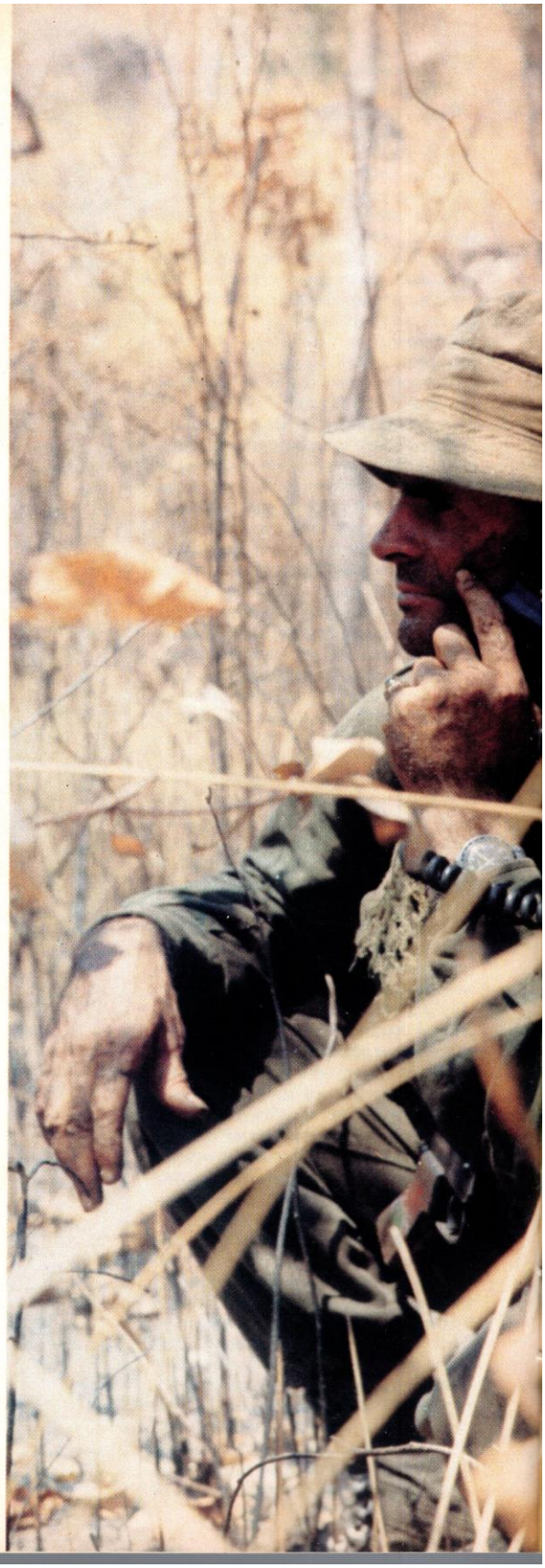
In August 1962, when the numbers of American advisers in Vietnam were increasing in response to mounting Viet Cong insurgency, 29 officers and warrant officers (senior non-commissioned officers) of the Australian Army arrived in Saigon as fellow advisers to the South Vietnamese. They had been sent to Vietnam as a gesture of solidarity with the United States in its defense of South Vietnam against Communist aggression.

The Aussie advisers were called the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV), generally referred to as "the Team." Each man was highly trained in jungle warfare and counter-insurgency, and most had had experience in Malaya fighting Communist insurgency there. Their orders were to train South Vietnamese units in jungle warfare, counter-insurgency tactics and village defense.

Like the early U.S. contingents in Vietnam, they were specifically forbidden to engage in combat. Nonetheless, the Australian advisers, their personnel and roles changing over time and their numbers varying up to 200 (many returned for second and third tours of duty), were to stay in Vietnam for 10½ years. Australia and neighboring New Zealand also deployed combat units to Vietnam, more than 10,000 men, before the war ended.

The "Team's" commander, Colonel F. P. Serong established himself in Saigon with three aides from the Team and sent 10 of its members to join American advisers at the Vietnamese National Training Center, Dong Da; 10 to the Civil Guard Training Center, Hiep Khanh; four to the Vietnamese Ranger Training Center, Duc My; and two to the CIA's Combined Studies Division. For the Aussies there now began many months of dull, boring, often frustrating training and teaching.

It soon became clear that the training being given by the Australians—in small-scale jungle warfare and counter-insurgency tactics, with emphasis on individual skills and a high level of leadership at section and platoon level—was quite different from American training, which was concerned with building up large forces to combat anticipated mass invasion from the North. Team members guessed that as soon as their



Platoon Sgt. Paul Weedman and Radio Operator Pvt. Thomas Hunt of 8th Plt., Co. C, 7th Royal Australian Regt., check with command during an ambush patrol in the Nui Tuy Vai hills, February 28, 1968. After the Boer War and Gallipoli, fighting other peoples' wars was nothing new to the Aussies.

Troops and M-113 APCs of the Royal Australian Regiment return from patrol near Bien Hoa. The two men in the foreground carry M-16s; another carries an M-79 grenade launcher. The rest carry standard NATO FN rifles, which were the most commonly used firearm among the Australian troops. Even with the gun shields shown, the Australians were dissatisfied with the vulnerable M-113s, and developed their own uparmed versions with 76mm-gunned Saladin and twin machine gun-armed V-100 Commando armored car turrets. The potent results, collectively called M-113A1s, provided welcome fire support in the field, and are still used by the Australian Army.

trainees left the training centers and were absorbed into the general stream, their Australian training was forgotten It galled the Aussies not to be allowed to accompany them on operations to ascertain what effect, if any, their training had had. They demanded that the ban on combat be lifted, but it wasn't officially lifted for two years—not until July 1964, when, with the United States becoming more deeply involved in Vietnam, the Australian Government agreed to send additional officers and senior NCOs to the Team, these to be posted as operational advisers. This move effectively lifted the ban on combat.

Some of the Team, however, already had seen action in the course of carrying out their training activities—as, for example, when caught in Viet Cong ambushes or as a result of being re-assigned to U.S. Special Forces.

In April 1964, Captain Noel Delahunty had taken a 56-man unit of Vietnamese Special Forces and local troops, with two American Special Forces sergeants, on a secret patrol close to the Laotian border in Quang Nam Province to find a site for a new Special Forces post that would be used as a base for raiding enemy reinforcements and supplies moving along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. From the first, Delahunty enforced standard Australian Army jungle patrol routine—and he wasn't very popular. This routine meant breaking camp in the darkness before dawn and ensuring that nothing was left to tell an enemy anyone had been there that night; then, without food or cigarets, moving at first light. About 9 a.m. there was a halt for a hot meal, after ensuring that fires and smoke and the smell of cooking wouldn't be detected, and with sentries posted in relays while others ate. And then on again through the morning and afternoon until about 5 p.m., when a camp site was selected and secured, sentries posted, followed by a cold meal, no fires and sleep.

But the routine paid off. The patrol wasn't detected until, having selected a place called A Ro for the Special Forces post and having started on its way back, some of the patrol's sentries posted during the hot-meal break left their positions and sneaked back to camp for food. Without warning, a Viet Cong unit attacked. The patrol beat off the attack but now it was known to be in the area, and several attempts at interception and ambush were made before the 19-day patrol was over. Three of the patrol were killed and 12 wounded, the latter including Captain Delahunty.

Working with U.S. Special Forces ideally suited the Australians and a special relationship soon developed between them. On July 6, in the famous fire fight that produced the war's first U.S. Medal of Honor, the Special Forces outpost at Nam Dong was attacked just before dawn by Viet Cong in battalion strength in the middle of the night. Warrant Officer Kevin Conway of the Aussie Team and Special Forces Master Sgt. Gabriel Alamo were awakened by the blast of the first mortar rounds. They grabbed their weapons and, firing at Viet Cong already at the wire around the outpost, ran for a mortar pit to help another Green Beret who was beginning to fire mortar flares to light up the attack. Both were hit as they reached the pit. Their bodies were found together beside the mortar when the attack was beaten off. (It was U.S. Special Forces Captain Roger Donlon who earned the Medal of Honor in the same battle—See *Beret Team's Brave Stand*, Winter 1988 issue of *Vietnam* Magazine.)

In August 1963, another Team member, Captain Barry

Petersen, a veteran of the anti-guerrilla campaign in Malaya, had been sent by the CIA Combined Studies Division to Darlac Province in the Central Highlands to train and organize para-military political-action teams among the area's Montagnards. He became proficient in the language of these mountain people and gained their confidence. When Warrant Officer Bevan Stokes was posted to assist him, they began teaching offensive tactics, in addition to defense. Petersen intensified weapons training, demolition, navigation and radio operation, his idea being the systematic infiltration and disruption of Viet Cong supply routes by raiding and ambushing. By 1965 he commanded an efficient and potentially very effective guerrilla force, already tested in action, of more than 1,000 men and was personally honored by being made a Montagnard "tribal chief." But the South Vietnamese government, wary of Montagnard aspirations for independence and fearful that Petersen's growing guerrilla force might someday be used against it, demanded that Petersen be posted out of Vietnam. He was, but returned five years later for a tour of duty as a company commander with the Australian Task Force of that latter period.

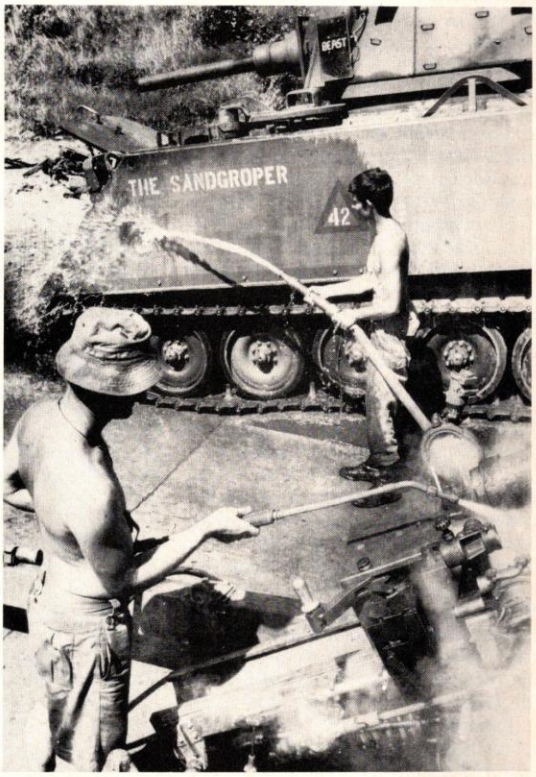
With reinforcements and postings as operational advisers from 1964 onwards, members of the Team were soon represented in most battalions of the first two divisions of the South Vietnamese I Corps, with the Ranger battalions and, later, with armored and artillery units. Like their comrades in Special Forces, the Aussie battalion advisers at times were involved in failures as well as successes.

In 1970, to stop North Vietnamese (NVA) infiltration into the western I Corps area, an interlocking series of firebases was to be constructed covering the infiltration lines. The first was to be on a bare hill called Tun Tavern, 70 kilometers west of Hue and eight kilometers from the Laos border. The 2nd Battalion, 54th ARVN (South Vietnamese) Regiment, with engineers and artillerymen, would be inserted. Defenses and sites for a battery of howitzers would be quickly prepared. Success depended on surprise and speed.

Advisers to the 2nd Battalion, 54th Regiment, were an American Marine Corps captain and an Australian warrant officer. Three American signalers were attached to the battalion. Since the plan called for one company of the battalion to give cover from a hill a kilometer from Tun Tavern, Captain Bill Deane and Warrant Officer Tom Waters, both of the Team, were temporarily attached as advisers to the cover company.

Early morning of May 31, the cover company was helicoptered to a clearing near the hill it was to occupy and came under heavy mortar fire. Whether the deployed troops were just unlucky or the operation had been betrayed, they never knew. The rest of the battalion soon arrived, and those men, too, came under fire. Airstrikes were called in, and the company and the battalion made it to their positions and began to dig in. The NVA mortaring and rocketing died down to a low level, and casualties were evacuated. Next day, a bulldozer was delivered by helicopter and work on the firebase went ahead in relative peace and quiet. Then, before dawn on the third day, the NVA struck, hurling barrage after barrage of mortar rounds and rockets onto Tun Tavern and raking it with machine guns, obviously preparatory to an attack.

At 6 a.m., Captain Deane's company was ordered to the assistance of the battalion on Tun Tavern; when he and his men reached it, the NVA was already inside the defense perimeter, but the company fought its way in and the NVA broke off the attack. Dust and smoke hung around the hill—dead and wounded littered the ground. One of the American radio operators was dead, the other two wounded. The Australian warrant officer assigned to 2nd Battalion was wounded and able only to crawl. Deane radioed for medivac helicopters, and they arrived almost immediately. Then, panic set in, as the lightly wounded and unwounded rushed the



TOP: A trooper of the Royal Australian Regiment helps guide in a helicopter. ABOVE: A 105mm howitzer of the 104th Field Artillery is steam-cleaned while a crewman of A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regt., hoses down his M-113A1, prior to their departure for home on March 12, 1972. Australian quarantine regulations required that all equipment be cleared of organic matter prior to shipment. The M-113A1 fire support vehicle was a unique Aussie improvisation mounting a 76mm gun turret from a Saladin armored car.

helicopters, leaving the more seriously wounded to fend for themselves. Deane and Warrant Officer Waters carried the more seriously wounded American signaller to a helicopter and fought their way through the milling troops to get him aboard. As they then got their wounded warrant officer on another helicopter, several choppers lifted off with soldiers clinging to the landing struts.

Meanwhile, shelling had started again and the command post had been hit, badly wounding the USMC battalion adviser. All the ARVN officers had been wounded, most only slightly, but all demanded evacuation. Their headquarters detailed one of the South Vietnamese officers to stay on as the American adviser's contact with the troops. The others left as soon as they could.

The adviser, a USMC Captain McCann, ordered more and better defenses and set the troops to work, inspecting them as best he could while Australians Deane and Waters, often talking directly to the pilots of planes above, guided them onto targets. They called in more medivac helicopters and this time supervised the loading, turning back the lightly wounded—and those fakers who had smeared themselves with blood and wrapped themselves in bandages. That evening, mortar-bomb splinters ripped into Waters' leg, crippling him. He was evacuated that night.

With only advisers McCann and Deane and the lone ARVN officer left, a Vietnamese colonel was helicoptered in to take command. He arrived before dark, was slightly wounded, and then he was evacuated.

That night the NVA probed and fired into the position but did not attack, and early the next morning medivac helicopters once again began arriving to take out the wounded. McCann, who had been wounded again, was evacuated, leaving only Deane and the ARVN officer.

Deane organized the preparation of the positions for the howitzers, if and when they would come, and began reorganizing and trying to inspire the defense, stopping only to direct an airstrike when he could. The shelling continued, and then the order came to withdraw from Tun Tavern.

At 2:30 p.m. the troops left the hill, carrying their wounded to an evacuation zone 500 meters away, leaving Deane, the ARVN officer and an engineer on the hill. The ARVN officer ordered the engineer to blow up the bulldozer and Deane to cover him while he did it, then hurried off after the others. Deane and the engineer blew the bulldozer and ran for the evacuation zone, reaching it safely.

The performance of the 2nd Battalion, 54th Regiment, had been abysmal. Deane, it is said, left Tun Tavern a very disgusted man.

Just the year before, also in May, the NVA had laid siege to the strategically placed Special Forces outpost of Ben Het in the Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia border area. The NVA 66th Regiment was suspected to be infiltrating down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to add muscle to the siege. At Pleiku to the south the ARVN 1st and 5th Mobile Strike (Mike) Force Battalions were ordered to locate the infiltration route, find the NVA 66th Regiment and stop it from reaching Ben Het — or at least hold it until reinforcements arrived.

The 1st Mike Force Battalion was temporarily under command of its executive officer, an American Lieutenant D. James, Jr. Its three companies were commanded by Warrant Officer Barry Tolley (the Team), Warrant Officer Keith Payne (the Team) and Sergeant "Monty" Montez of U.S. Special Forces. Payne's 212th Company of 89 Montagnards included 37 with only 12 days' Special Forces training, since they were replacements for losses sustained in a previous fight. They were in three platoons commanded by Warrant Officer Kevin Latham of the Team and two Special Forces sergeants, Jack Clement and Gerard Dellwo.

The 1st and 5th Mike Battalions were helicoptered to a ridge within nine kilometers of Ben Het and arrived under heavy fire. The 1st Battalion was ordered to clear the ridge. Payne and Montez took their companies forward, with Tolley's company bringing up the rear collecting weapons and the dead and wounded. They found the main enemy position on a hilltop only 700 meters away and realized they had found the 66th NVA Regiment right away—they were in its midst! An airstrike was called on the position, and when it was over Payne's and Montez' companies occupied it. The NVA had disappeared. But not for long. Twenty minutes later the NVA, who had evacuated the position in anticipation of an airstrike, were back with machine guns, rockets and mortars, and all hell broke loose.

Encouraging his inexperienced soldiers, Warrant Officer

SOME CONTRIBUTED, MANY DID NOT

The Australian advisers of "the Team" were not the only fighting men sent to Vietnam from "Down Under"—nor were the Australians the only American ally to join in the fight to preserve South Vietnam's independence. (But few did, overall.)

Long before the lengthy war began to wind down, Australia had as many as 6,000 combat troops in the field. Tiny New Zealand had contributed a much smaller contingent, chiefly an artillery battery, while fighting forces also came from Thailand, the Philippines and South Korea.

The South Koreans, recalling the help they received during the Korean War of the early 1950s, sent by far the largest Allied force—some 48,000 men. Other Free World nations, Britain, West Germany and Japan among them, contributed materiel such as radios or ambulances or technical assistance in the civilian arena, but no fighting forces.

In America, where controversy swirled over the enormous U.S. commitment to the war effort, many key officials were frankly disappointed by the token support from most of the nation's Free World allies. In early 1966, Senator Richard L. Russell, chairman of the Senate Armed Forces Committee, said America should be more insistent "that our allies, for whom we have done so much, make a larger contribution to the defense of freedom around the world."

Recalling that at the end of World War II American economic muscle was crucial to the post-war restoration of friends and enemies alike, Russell also said, "Countries like these, which have received benefits without parallel in all of history, should be willing to make a larger military contribution to preserving the cause of peace."

About the same time, Secretary of State Dean Rusk publicly was urging further help in Vietnam from America's allies. Few responded so generously as South Korea and Australia.

An official South Korean publication said that nation's combat force—second in size only to America's, among those nations helping the South Vietnamese—was deployed "to partly repay the debt Korea received from 16 Free World allied nations during the Korean War and to live up to the principles of collective security for the Free World."

To this, South Korean President Chung Hee Park added: "We must aid the Republic of Vietnam, which has made great sacrifices fighting Communism, and the United States, which has been supporting Free Vietnam. We must never assume the role of a mere bystander." An unchecked fire in a neighbor's house may spread to your own, Park warned.

In Australia, meanwhile, a 1,500-man reinforced infantry battalion initially contributed to the Vietnam effort in the 1960s and was one of only three

Payne ran from point to point of the perimeter, firing his Armalite and taking grenades from his men and throwing them at the North Vietnamese, who were very close. A rocket-propelled grenade decapitated his radio operator and tore the Armalite from his hands. Bleeding from a head wound, he picked up an M60 machine gun and continued blazing away at the enemy. They faltered and then came on again—the Montagnards panicked and ran. Payne took a short-cut across open ground and caught them, stopping the retreat and, bleeding again from mortar splinters in his hands and arms, formed a new defensive position for his and Montez' mixed companies. Montez himself was missing. Then two armed helicopters arrived and laid down protective fire around Payne and his men.

When darkness came, Payne obtained permission from the battalion commander, who was himself wounded, to go out and find their missing and wounded and bring them in. He went alone. Only one of the Team and U.S. Special Forces was unwounded, Sergeant Dellwo. Not only could he actively supervise the occupied position, but his medical training was needed where he was.

Payne went out four times, through enemy lines as far as the hill, and each time returned with wounded and stragglers. In the first batch he brought in the badly wounded Sergeant Montez. During his forays he sometimes heard single shots—the NVA finishing off wounded Montagnards—and he himself was fired upon again and again. When he brought back the fourth batch, there was no defensive position awaiting him. It had moved. The battalion commander had ordered what was left of the battalion to find the 5th Battalion base and get help.

Payne followed the departed unit's tracks with his wounded and stragglers until he came upon Sergeant Dellwo and a U.S. Special Forces medic from the 213th Company; they had stopped, staying behind to attend to Montez and four very badly wounded Montagnards. Knowing that if he could follow the trail left by the battalion the NVA also could, Payne got the whole party on the move, the unwounded and lesser wounded carrying and helping the more serious cases. All told, there were Payne, three U.S. Special Forces sergeants (including Montez) and 40 Montagnards. Payne radioed repeatedly for a medivac helicopter for Montez, who obviously would die if he wasn't evacuated quickly. Finally one came, and Payne located an opening in the jungle canopy through which Montez could be winched to the helicopter. But "Monty" Montez died on the way to military hospital.

Payne next arranged for an aircraft to keep flying overhead to drown out the noise he and his men were making as they continued their slow, agonizing way over steep and treacherous ground. At last, they staggered into the 5th Battalion base and were met by what was left of Tolley's 211th Company, which had found its way to the base earlier. Little more than a third of the 1st Battalion had managed to survive the engagement with the North Vietnamese Army.

Payne was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award for bravery among British Commonwealth nations, for "sustained and personal efforts [that] undoubtedly saved the lives of his indigenous soldiers and several of his fellow advisers."

Three other members of the Aussie Team in Vietnam were awarded the Victoria Cross for similar services, two of them being killed while performing their acts of heroism.

Through 1969 and 1970, the NVA and Viet Cong had been attacking, and wiping out when they could, the Special Forces outposts that formed a chain north to south in the Central Highlands. In April 1970, it was to be the turn of Dak Seang in Kontum province, an outpost of more than 300 Montagnards led by South Vietnamese Special Forces, assisted by U.S. Special Forces advisers.

Two NVA regiments and an artillery regiment moved down from the surrounding hills and, hidden by jungle and bamboo, dug fighting pits and bunkers within a few hundred meters of the outpost. A barrage from guns, mortars and rocket launchers began the siege of Dak Seang, and soon the outpost was in desperate need of help. Once again it was the 1st Mike Force Battalion at Pleiku that was ordered to the rescue.

The battalion was now commanded by Major Patrick Beale of the Team. Its 211th Company of half-trained Montagnards was commanded by Team Captain Peter Shilston, assisted by Warrant Officers Sanderson, Cochrane, John Pettit and "Geordie" Jamieson. The 212th Company was commanded by Warrant Officer "Aggy" White, assisted by Warrant Offi-

The Koreans were exceptional fighters, but their tendency to "advertise" (note colorful Tiger Division emblem on M-113s) caused the Communists to avoid them.

combat-ready battalions in the entire Australian Army at the time. The 6,000-man force eventually deployed in Vietnam included Australian draftees—the first to be sent overseas since World World II.

Australia, said Prime Minister Harold Holt in the mid-1960s, "cannot stand aside in the struggle to resist the aggressive threat of Communism in Asia."

The *Sydney Sunday Telegram* one weekend asked the question: "Do we in Australia fully realize what we owe to the United States?"

The same editorial went on to say, "Without the vast strength of America, the Free World would fall like a ripe plum into the hands of Communism."

Also noting that the United States had more than a million servicemen posted overseas, the editorial added: "The tasks and responsibilities of the United States are almost terrifying in their magnitude. We in Australia, like all free men, should thank God for the United States' protection and friendship, and her contributions throughout the world to the cause of peace."

Despite such sentiments, and the military deployments of a few, many in America were disappointed by the limited contributions of other Free World nations to the war in Vietnam. That view was succinctly expressed by Virginia's Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr. when, in the mid-1960s, he asked an audience in Richmond, "Where are our alliance partners when the chips are down, as they are in Vietnam?"

Richard P. Montpelier

TOP: On patrol, an Australian reflects confidence in his training, the product of experience in jungle warfare from New Guinea to Malaya. The Aussies were often critical of the Yanks' reliance on technology and heavy-handed conventional warfare. ABOVE: Typical Australian technique for dealing with underground enemy tunnels was to simply pump smoke or gas into them.

cers Barnes and Alec McCloskey, and the 213th was under U.S. Special Forces command. The Battalion had returned from a three-week operational sweep south of Pleiku just the day previous to 250 of them being helicoptered to a landing zone 2,500 meters from Dak Seang, the remainder being unable to land because of darkness.

Major Beale had asked for the landing zone to be neutralized, but there were no aircraft available for the task. Inevitably, the NVA had all likely landing zones covered, and the landing was met by a withering barrage of rifle, machine-gun and rocket fire.

Captain Shilston and his Warrant Officer Sanderson were in the first helicopter to land and led their Montagnards in a charge against a heavy machine-gun emplacement. Sanderson was hit in the leg but kept going. Over them another helicopter came in to hover only meters away from the emplacement. Warrant Officer Cochrane leaped out and with grenades wiped out the emplacement. Six bunkers were attacked and cleared in the immediate vicinity as more troops landed, and they then dug in for a night of mortar rounds, rockets and bullets.

The remainder of the battalion came in next morning in a hail of NVA fire, along with smoke and dust so thick that some of the guns on the helicopters fired into the battalion area, killing one Montagnard and wounding seven others, including the U.S. Special Forces captain commanding the 213th Company.

Major Beale got the Battalion on the move for Dak Seang 2,500 meters away, Shilston's 211th Company leading. They hadn't gone far when the forward platoon came under fire from a bunker complex. Three Montagnards were hit and Warrant Officer Pettit crawled forward to give them first aid. He then sprang to his feet and charged the nearest bunker, firing as he ran. He was shot down within two meters of it.

The company had kept moving but, 50 meters on, came under fire from more bunkers. Shilston and his warrant officers led a charge against these bunkers, cleared five of them and then withdrew to allow an airstrike to clear the rest.

At the end of the day, helicopters brought in food, water and ammunition and evacuated out the wounded. The Battalion established a defensive position. It had fought its way only 500 meters closer to Dak Seang; there were still 2,000 meters to go.

Sanderson, immobilized by his leg wound, had been evacuated, together with the seriously wounded Special Forces commander of the 213th, and Pettit was dead Next morning Warrant Officer "Locky" Scowcroft arrived among some Montagnards as replacement for Pettit. The Battalion moved on but almost immediately came up against another line of bunkers. An airstrike was called, and when it was over the troops moved in with grenades to finish off what was left.

The Battalion moved cautiously on into more open country—and an unearthly silence. Its men were 1,300 meters from Dak Seang when the silence was shattered by gunfire as the NVA attacked. The attack was only broken when a "Spooky" (C-47 gunship) arrived and "hosed" the area around the Battalion with its multi-barrelled gun.

But the NVA attacked again and again through the day and most of the night, only airstrikes preventing them massing for a decisive attack. The strikes were so close that on one occasion a napalm canister fell among the Montagnards, killing four and wounding 17.

Next day, continual attacks assisted by airstrikes could not push the NVA back—the situation of the Battalion became progressively worse as the NVA counter-attacked. Finally, with the Battalion out of water and food and almost out of ammunition, many of its men of wounded, the end seemed very close. But the Battalion held on into the next day, when the more seriously wounded Montagnards began dying to the

death chants of their comrades and the NVA continued mortaring and machine-gunning the position. Late in the afternoon helicopters made a dangerous dash into the position with ammunition and supplies, and it began to rain. The Battalion was given a new lease on life and on the next day launched more attacks, preceded by airstrikes, against the NVA. But the attacks were repelled—the NVA was still too strong. Major Beale called for reinforcements and planned his next attacks.

Reinforcements came in the following morning, into fire so heavy that many went back as casualties on the very helicopters they had arrived in. In the afternoon the 4th Battalion, 2nd Mike Force, was flown in.

Next day, Warrant Officers White, Barnes and McCloskey and their Montagnards fought their way into bunkers that had been an NVA regimental headquarters. It consisted of 17 large bunkers protected by a perimeter of weapon pits and covered an area 250 by 100 meters.

If the Mike Force had broken out, meanwhile, the battle was by no means finished. Close-quarter fighting continued throughout the next day as the Mike Force units continued their painstakingly slow progress towards Dak Seang, resupplied by helicopters. The ammunition boxes and supplies were passed from the hovering choppers into the hands of the soldiers on the ground. Three U.S. Special Forces advisers were wounded during the day.

The following day, the relief force was again stopped by a bunker system, only 300 meters from Dak Seang's defenses. The 213th Company mounted a frontal attack on the bunkers, while Shilston and White led flanking attacks. The 213th cleared the bunkers.

From the edge of the jungle the battered survivors now could look out across the clearing around Dak Seang to what it had taken them seven days of hell to reach, a smashed and smoldering fort covered with craters and surrounded by the black scars of napalm. A few Montagnards came out of the fort to meet them.

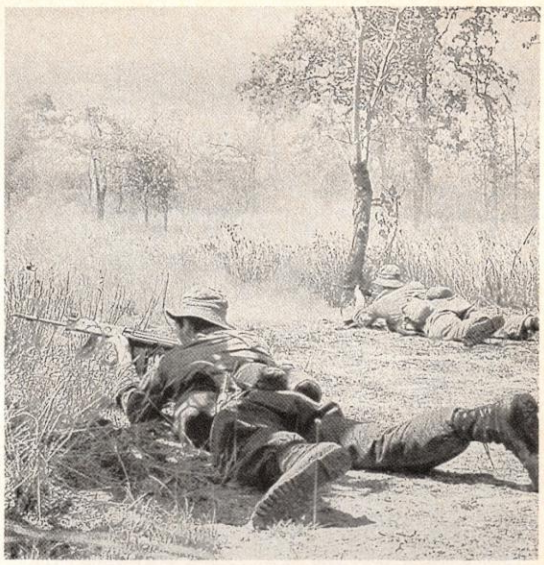
Dak Seang had been reached, but the siege still wasn't broken—the NVA began bombarding again, even while the would-be rescuers sized up the situation at Dak Seang. Once again the Mike Force went into a defensive position. But the NVA main forces appeared finally to be pulling back, and the next day Beale took his reinforced battalion on the offensive. Covered by airstrikes, he began circling the perimeter of Dak Seang, attacking bunkers and fortified positions, and the next day clearing the NVA from the scrub around the fort. Another U.S. Special Forces adviser was among the latest to be seriously wounded.

On 13 April, clearing patrols finally found they were unopposed. The NVA had moved back. Aerial reconnaissance showed they were now in positions 3,000 meters from Dak Seang. The siege had been broken.

Soon after Dak Seang, the Team's association with the American Special Forces began to wind down as the Mike Forces were transferred to Regional Force and Ranger battalions in line with the program of Vietnamization. By the end of 1970, the eight-year association had come to an end.

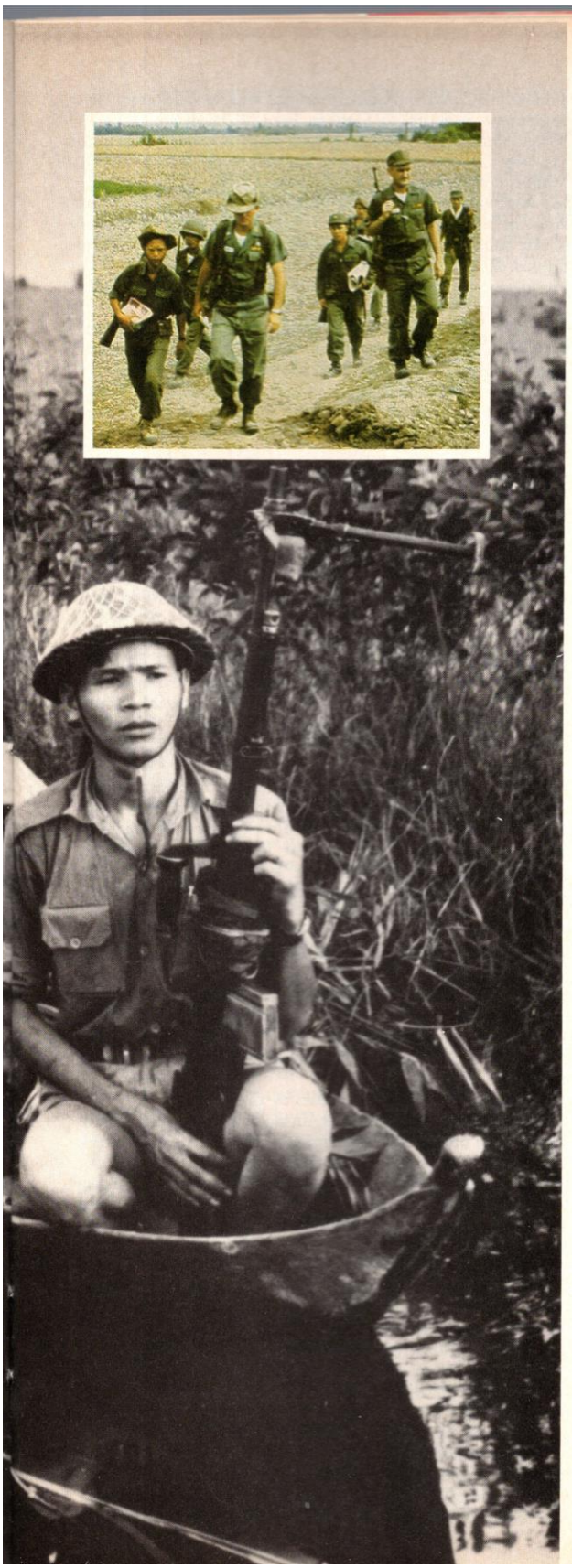
Most of the Team moved on to attachment to the newly-formed Mobile Advisory and Training Teams (MATTs), but these were found to be not as effective as hoped and, by the end of 1971, the Team had been reduced to 65 men. Once again they were forbidden to engage in operations. By the end of the next year, the last of these highly decorated Australian professionals had left Vietnam, to pass on their skills and experience to younger soldiers at home.□

John Brown is a free-lance writer specializing in military affairs and based in Australia. Related readings: Vietnam: A History *by Stanley Karnow;* The Green Berets at War, *by Shelby Stanton.*



TOP: Members of the Royal Australian Regiment train in ambush tactics. These were highly effective whenever the Aussies could make contact with the elusive enemy. MIDDLE: "Scrub-bashing"—a Centurion tank of C Squadron, 1st Armored Regt., its side skirts removed to prevent clogging with mud and vegetation, supports 3rd RAR during Operation Overlord in Phuoc Tuy and Long Khanh Provinces, June 1971. ABOVE: A casualty is tended to by the medics.

As the Viet Cong steadily gained control of the countryside and waterways, U.S. advisers like John Paul Vann made a dedicated, if frustrated, effort to train Saigon's army to stop them. INSET: ARVN soldiers and two American advisers distribute propaganda leaflets on February 21, 1963.



TROUBLED APOSTLE OF VICTORY

John Paul Vann, military man and civilian adviser, was a legend as contradictory as Vietnam itself.

Interview by Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr.

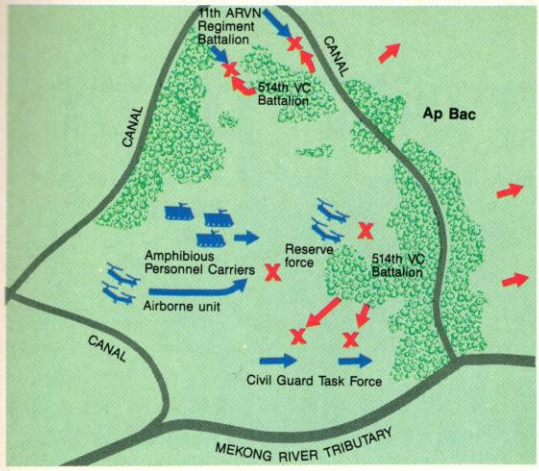
John Paul Vann was one of the legendary figures of the Vietnam War. At his funeral ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery in 1972, Ambassador Robert Komer called him "one of the authentic heroes of a grim and unpopular war, who gave all of himself to the cause he served, finally even his life." Later, at a White House ceremony, President Nixon personally presented a posthumous Medal of Freedom to Vann's son.

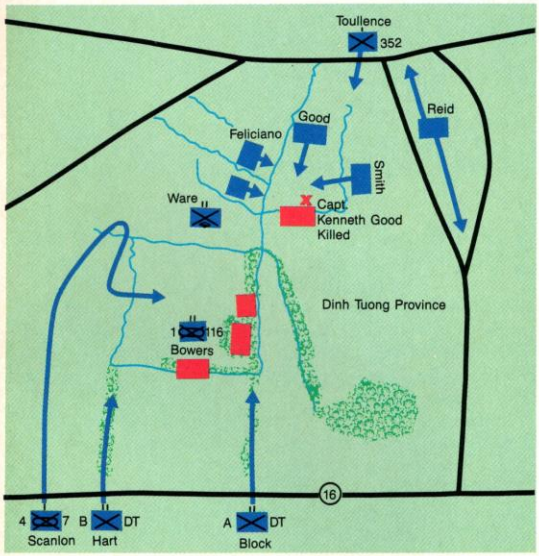
Unlike most American Vietnam-war notables whose reputations were built on their service with American units, Vann saw his reputation grow out of his service as an adviser to the South Vietnamese military. As an American Army lieutenant colonel in 1962-63, he was the senior adviser to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) 7th Infantry Division in the Mekong Delta and shared the Division's travail during the battle of Ap Bac in January 1963—one of the few truly decisive battles of the entire war.

After his one-year tour of duty was completed, Vann rotated back to the United States in April 1963 on orders to become a student at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces that summer. In the meantime he was assigned to the Army's Special Warfare Directorate in the Pentagon, where he put together a briefing on what was wrong with U.S. strategy in Vietnam. Scheduled to brief the Joint Chiefs of Staff on his findings on July 8, 1963, he saw his briefing canceled by JCS Chairman General Maxwell D. Taylor himself only hours before it was to begin.

At the end of that month he retired from the Army, ostensibly in disgust at his shoddy treatment in Washington and at the refusal of top officials to face the truth about what was happening in the war. But Vietnam was in his blood. After a short interlude as an aerospace executive, Vann returned to Vietnam in March 1965 as a civilian employee of the Agency for International Development (AID).

His first assignment was as province adviser in guerrilla-infested Hau Nghia Province northwest of Saigon. At the end of 1966 he moved to Bien Hoa to be the civilian affairs adviser in III Corps and in June 1967 was named Deputy Com-





TOP: Intended to draw the VC 514th Regiment into a set-piece battle, the assault on Ap Bac on January 2, 1963, was a poorly coordinated fiasco and an embarrassing setback for the ARVN. MIDDLE: A map by Lt. Col. Richard Ziegler shows the deployment of U.S. advisers and location of the death of Captain Kenneth Good. ABOVE: Viet Cong tactics were updates of ancient guerrilla techniques perfected over hundreds of years. Here, Viet Minh veteran Ho Nhet passes on his experience to a younger generation of fighters.

mander for CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) to General Fred Weyand, the II Field Force commander. There he played a major role in thwarting the Viet Cong's Tet Offensive the following year.

Vann continued to be an outspoken critic of the way the war was being conducted. His 1965 paper "*Harnessing the Revolution in South Vietnam*" was to provide the basis for much of the subsequent pacification effort, and his commentary on post-Tet 1968 U.S. strategy was to provide the intellectual foundation for the Nixon Administration's program to Vietnamize the war.

In May 1971, Vann was named director of the Second Regional Assistance Command—in fact, if not in name, the senior adviser to the ARVN II Corps commander and the American commander in the Central Highlands and the adjacent provinces on the central coast. He was to play a key role in the battle for Kontum during the North Vietnamese Army's 1972 Eastertide offensive, and there, only days after the battle was won, he met his death when in the midst of a rainstorm, his helicopter crashed into a Montagnard graveyard.

Fifteen years in the writing, Neil Sheehan's recently published book, *The Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House) not only is the definitive account of the experiences of John Paul Vann but also is a telling indictment of the war itself.

A distinguished journalist who spent more than three years in Vietnam—from April 1962 to April 1964 as a war correspondent for UPI (United Press International), and from August 1965 to August 1966 as a combat correspondent for the *New York Times* and two later research trips for his book—Sheehan also writes with the perspective of a former soldier.

Signing up for a three-year enlistment in 1959, a year after he graduated from Harvard, Sheehan learned his journalistic skills as an Army newsman with the U.S. 7th Infantry Division in Korea and later with the editorial offices of the Division's newspaper, *The Bayonet*, in Tokyo. There he began moonlighting for UPI. When he was discharged from the Army in 1962 he signed up with UPI fulltime and was immediately sent to Vietnam to cover the war there.

Summers: The title of your book, *A Bright Shining Lie*, sounds like the title of one of those one-sided, know-nothing anti-war screeds.

Sheehan: Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the words are not mine. They're from John Paul Vann's reply to an Army historian in 1963. "We had also, to all the visitors who came over there, been one of the bright shining lies," he said.

Summers: What did he mean by that?

Sheehan: He was angry with himself for having helped the senior U.S. officers in Vietnam, especially MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) commander General Paul D. Harkins, to cover up the fact that the South Vietnamese Army—the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)—had an institutionalized unwillingness to fight, that the war was being lost.

Summers: Those are pretty strong charges.

Sheehan: Don't misinterpret what I'm saying. ARVN had some fine officers, and I certainly would take nothing away from the bravery and the sacrifice of the quarter-million South Vietnamese who were killed in action, nor from the more than twice that number who were wounded in action before the collapse in 1975. But the senior leaders were whipped before they started.

Summers: How so?

Sheehan: Many, such as Duong Van Minh and the other generals who overthrew Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, were part of the Franco-Vietnamese elite the colonial system had created. As such they were the heirs of a defeated colonial army

and had a persistent inferiority complex when it came to fighting the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese.

Summers: When did the fact that ARVN would not fight first become known?

Sheehan: It became apparent early on, and that's where John Paul Vann comes in. He was among the first to alert the senior leadership in Vietnam to that fact when he was the senior adviser to Colonel Huynh Van Cao, then the ARVN 7th Division Commander in the upper Mekong Delta in 1962-1963.

Summers: That's when you first met Vann?

Sheehan: Right. I met him in the early summer of 1962 at the 7th Division headquarters at My Tho when I went out on my first helicopter operation. I had arrived in Vietnam in April 1962 to serve as Saigon Bureau Chief for the UPI. Vann had arrived the month before.

Summers: Was Vann openly critical and untrusting of his ARVN counterpart?

Sheehan: Not at first. In fact it was exactly the opposite. His efforts were directed at building Colonel Cao's confidence, and he used to give us pep talks on "emphasizing the positive" in our stories in order to encourage our ally.

Summers: When did that change?

Sheehan: Although he kept it from the reporters at the time, Vann's attitude began to change in July 1962 when an operation he had planned with Colonel Cao fell apart and Cao deliberately allowed the Viet Cong to escape. Vann later found that he did so to avoid taking casualties, a restriction imposed by South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem himself.

Summers: Avoiding casualties may sound humanitarian, but on the battlefield it can be suicidal if the enemy does not follow suit. But I have an idea that it was not humanitarianism that prompted President Diem's order.

Sheehan: Humanitarianism had nothing to do with it. The Americans saw the ARVN as an army with which to defend South Vietnam. Diem and his supporters saw the ARVN primarily as a force-in-being to safeguard their regime.

Summers: But didn't they see that if they didn't defend the country, they'd surely lose?

Sheehan: They thought that even if most of the South was ultimately lost to the Communists, an intact ARVN would enable them to hold on to Saigon and the other major population centers long enough for Washington to send the U.S. Army and the Marines to rescue them.

Summers: What brought this out into the open?

Sheehan: The battle of Ap Bac in January 1963 was the catalyst. It began as an ARVN 7th Division operation to seize a Viet Cong radio transmitter that was operating from the hamlet of Tan Thoi 14 miles northwest of My Tho. No one expected to find more than 120 Viet Cong, but nearly three times that many had been assembled in Tan Thoi, and the hamlet ("Ap" in Vietnamese) of Bac just below it. Before the battle was over, the Viet Cong (who lost 18 killed and 31 wounded) inflicted about 80 killed and well over 100 wounded on the Saigon forces and also killed three Americans, wounded another eight, accounted for five helicopters and deflected an assault by a company of M-113 armored personnel carriers with just rifles, machine guns and grenades—no antitank weapons.

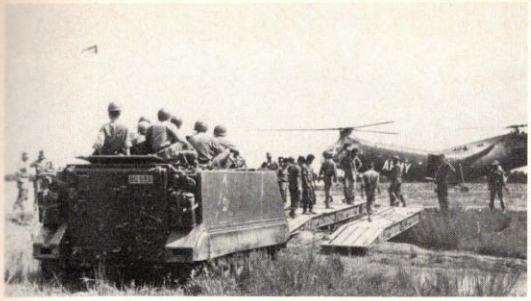
Summers: Sounds like a real fiasco.

Sheehan: It was. Vann called it a "miserable damn performance," and what Vann did not say, his subordinates said for him. But what made it so ludicrous is that General Harkins tried to pass it off as a victory.

Summers: But he didn't get away with it.

Sheehan: He sure didn't. Ap Bac was putting Vietnam on the front pages and on the television evening news shows with a drama that no other event had yet achieved. The dispatches,

TOP: Captain Tram Tien Khang, CO of 1st Battalion, 7th Division, briefs two of his officers. The 7th Division was the main participant in the debacle at Ap Bac. Much of the poor performance and morale of its troops stemmed from higher up their chain of command. MIDDLE: Neil Sheehan of United Press International discusses a point of strategy with Brig. Gen. Du Quoc Dong. ABOVE: Lt. Col. John Paul Vann (left) tried to instill an aggressiveness into the 7th Division that he believed was being discouraged by President Vo Nguyen Diem himself.



TOP: The main support vehicles of the ARVN in 1963: An M-113 of the 21st Mechanized Rifle Company crosses an irrigation ditch near a Piacecki CH-21c "Shawnee" helicopter near Can Tho. MIDDLE: Their close proximity to one another an invitation to disaster, soldiers of the 21st Division (ARVN) patrol a village rice paddy for suspected VC. ABOVE: After the defeat at Ap Bac, a UH-1B Huey recovers the remains of another. Five helicopters were destroyed in the day-long battle.

replete with details of cowardice and bungling and salty quotations like Vann's "miserable damn performance" remark, were describing the battle as the worst and most humiliating defeat ever inflicted on the Saigon side and as a dramatic illumination of all of the flaws in Diem's armed forces.

Summers: So it was the "credibility gap" between what was really happening and what the senior political and military leadership in Saigon said was happening that made Ap Bac such an important battle?

Sheehan: Ap Bac was a sharp picture that discredited the "big picture" MACV General Harking and U.S. Ambassador Frederick J. Nolting were projecting. We [the press] exploited the battle as much as we dared for this reason, and when Vann, out of his anger and a shared interest, tacitly offered an alliance afterward, we entered it eagerly.

Summers: Even President Kennedy shared the perception that the American newsmen in Vietnam were against the war from the beginning. Are you saying that this was not the case?

Sheehan: At least in the early days, the American reporters shared the advisers' sense of commitment to the war. Our ideological prism and cultural biases were in no way different. We regarded the conflict as our war, too. We believed in what our government said it was trying to accomplish in Vietnam, and we wanted our country to win. We thought it our duty to help win the war by reporting the truth of what was happening in order both to inform the public and to put the facts before those in power so that they could make correct decisions.

Summers: And Vann helped?

Sheehan: Vann taught us the most, and one can truly say that without him our reporting would not have been the same. After Ap Bac he saw a catastrophe in the making, and in his urgency to alert authority and prevent the catastrophe, he made up his mind to reach over General Harkin's head by influencing the reporters to speak with his voice. Because of Vann, Ap Bac was, for better or worse, a decisive battle.

Summers: With his dispatches in the *New York Times*, his profile of Vann in the November 1964 issue of *Esquire*, and his 1965 book *The Making of a Quagmire*, David Halberstam did much to create the John Paul Vann legend. But I take it Halberstam's views were widely shared.

Sheehan: When Vann left Vietnam in April 1963, the American war correspondents in Saigon, myself included, (and recall that in those days there were less than a dozen of us all told) chipped in and bought him an engraved silver cigarette box as a token of our esteem. His retirement later that year was the perfect, high-drama ending to the epic of Lt. Col. John Paul Vann, the officer of surpassing career promise, who had renounced a general's stars to alert the nation to the truth about the war in Vietnam because he was also a man of surpassing moral courage.

Summers: That reputation served him well.

Sheehan: It certainly did. The memory of Vann's moral heroism was the foundation of his reputation in later years in Vietnam for candor and willingness to grasp the brambles of fact however they might hurt. Even though he always drew back from condemning the war itself, this reputation for truth-telling lent credibility to what he had to say about the war to those who might differ from him on the fundamental issue of whether the United States ought to be waging war in Vietnam at all.

Summers: But after his death, you found that it was all a lie.

Sheehan: Not all a lie. He did have the moral courage to defy Harkins. He did fight to gain acceptance of the truth at the Pentagon. But he did not renounce his career and retire in protest in order to warn the country of impending disaster. He lied to Halberstam and manipulated him, and he had deceived everyone in Vietnam. He knew that he had no career to ruin and no stars to throw away. He also said more

about himself than he meant to say when he told the Army historian that he had been "one of the bright shining lies."

Summers: When he returned to the United States in 1963 he had been selected to attend the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, which means almost certain promotion to full colonel and which is an indication that he was considered general officer material. Why do you say he "had no career to ruin?"

Sheehan: He left the Army because a dark compulsion in his personality had led him to commit an act that he was convinced would bar him forever from promotion to general. He had been charged by a fellow officer with statutory rape of a 15-year-old girl, a former baby sitter, while a student at the Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth before coming to Vietnam. Although the case had never come to trial, the CID investigation was still on file in the Pentagon.

Summers: Vann seems to beg the question once asked (by historian S.L.A. Marshall I believe) about the famous 19th century British admiral, Viscount Horatio Nelson. "How do you evaluate Admiral Nelson?", he asked, "by the battles of Copenhagen, the Nile and Trafalgar or by his Irish whore?"

Sheehan: Marshall was unfair to Lady Hamilton, for she was far more than Nelson's "Irish whore." Certainly at Trafalgar, where on the British side 400 sailors were killed in action compared to 4,000 on the French and Spanish side, they were glad to have him in command regardless of his sexual morals. But the answer is that a public man must be judged by his public accomplishments. In Vann's case at least there was a duality at work—a duality of personal compulsions and deceits that would not bear light and a professional honesty that was rigorous and incorruptible.

Summers: And it was this professional side that propelled him into returning to Vietnam in 1965?

Sheehan: He was uncomfortable in civilian life. War was his profession and the challenges of Vietnam were obviously in his blood. After several tries, he finally was accepted by the Agency for International Developement as a province pacification officer.

Summers: By that time, as you yourself noted in your dispatches to the *New York Times*, the nature of the war had changed with the introduction of American ground combat forces into the war. How did Vann believe these troops should have been deployed?

Sheehan: Well, for one thing, Vann always felt that bringing in U.S. Army and Marine Corps units to take over the war would be the worst possible move. He was convinced that a way had to be found to make the ARVN fight, because waging the war with a Vietnamese army was the only course that made sense. To Vann and his friends, to resort to American ground combat units was a fateful but inconclusive act in a conflict of steadily diminishing alternatives. They saw it as an opportunity to start a process of political and social change that had to be seized before time and events diminished and then foreclosed it.

Summers: So what do you think Vann would have done?

Sheehan: Vann believed the sensible course would be to use the American troops to secure Saigon and the ports and airfields as well as major inland towns. The U.S. soldiers would serve as a garrison and an emergency reserve. The primary if unspoken mission of the American troops would be political. They would provide the muscle to stop the continuous coups and recoups and bring the Saigon generals into line. Behind this shield the U.S. would take over the regime and gradually turn it into a government whose leaders were not fundamentally corrupt. One element in accomplishing this goal Vann felt, would be to create a "joint command" in which Americans would issue the orders.

Summers: We were already being accused of being "imperialists." Would that have laid us open to charges of being "colonialists" as well?

Sheehan: That was the main argument against creating a joint command. Instead of using that system (which had been used successfully in the Korean War) the U.S. tried to work through its South Vietnamese surrogates in order to achieve its foreign policy goals in Southeast Asia. But Vann saw as early as 1962 that the surrogate system was not working. Vann's solution from the beginning was essentially to take South Vietnam over, "lock, stock and barrel," as he put it.

Summers: And he finally got his wish?

Sheehan: Not completely, but he did get several of his wishes. On May 15, 1971, he got the equivalent of general's stars when he was appointed to what had been a major general's position as direc-

HONEST BUT POLITICIZED GENERALS

Unlike all too many of their South Vietnamese counterparts, American generals in Vietnam were rarely venal or corrupt. Neither were they incompetent. Most of them had won their stars through campaigns on the battlefields of World War II and Korea.

Take the two mentioned by Neil Sheehan in this interview—General Paul D. Harkins and General Maxwell D. Taylor. Harkins served with General George S. Patton's Third Army in World War II and during the Korean war was Chief of Staff of the Eighth U.S. Army. Taylor jumped into Normandy on D-Day as commander of the 101st Airborne Division and was wounded in the later airborne operations in Holland.

So why were they running scared in the Vietnam War? Why did Harkins refuse to face the truth about the battlefield performance of the South Vietnamese and fail to report the facts to his superiors in Washington? Why did Taylor, by canceling the Vann briefing, also take a hand in hiding those facts from the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

General Bruce Palmer, Jr. provided the answer in his outstanding 1984 book on the war, *The Twenty-Five Year War: America's Military Role In Vietnam*. A West Point classmate of Generals Creighton Abrams and William C. Westmoreland, commander of II Field Force Vietnam and USARV (United States Army Vietnam) during the war, and himself a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Palmer knows of what he speaks. As he makes very clear, the senior levels of the officer corps had been politicized.

In 1959, General Maxwell D. Taylor, the Army Chief of Staff, retired over a dispute with President Eisenhower on what Taylor saw as too great a reliance on nuclear weapons. Taylor then allied himself with Senator John Kennedy in his bid for the presidency, and when Kennedy won the 1960 election, Taylor became his military adviser. Later, when then-Army Chief of Staff General George Decker disagreed with President Kennedy in 1962 on how to fight insurgent wars, Kennedy fired Decker and replaced him with Taylor protege General Earle Wheeler. Meanwhile Taylor was recalled to active duty and appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The message to the senior generals was clear—tell the politicians what they wanted to hear, or suffer the consequences. Reports were cut to fit the temper of the times. It is obvious in retrospect that while these "bright, shining lies" may have been music to the politician's ears at the time, in the long run, as policies built on those deceptions came crashing down, the deceptions proved to be disastrous for the United States.

The U.S. Army provided Piasecki CH-21 helicopters and aircrews to carry the ARVN troops into combat. Products of the 1950s, these ungainly "flying bananas" were too slow and vulnerable to deal with enemy ground fire, and suffered heavy losses.

tor of the Second Regional Assistance Group in the Central Highlands—in effect the senior American adviser to the ARVN II Corps commander. And when the North Vietnamese launched their Eastertide Offensive in 1972, one prong of which was aimed at Kontum in the Central Highlands, he took over command of II Corps "lock, stock and barrel."

Summers: What prompted him to do that?

Sheehan: The same old problem he had encountered in the Mekong Delta a decade earlier. The ARVN commanders would not fight. For example, the 22d ARVN Division Commander, Colonel Le Duc Dat (who was killed during the attack), had the ingrained inferiority complex of a Vietnamese who had fought with the French. He would explain to his American adviser that North Vietnamese soldiers were superior to South Vietnamese soldiers and you could not maneuver against the NVA. If you tried, they would surround and destroy you. Vann's counterpart, Maj. Gen. Ngo Dzo, the ARVN II Corps commander lost his nerve completely.

Summers: How on earth did Vann turn back the North Vietnamese attack?

Sheehan: For one thing, he made the B-52 bombers his personal weapon. Between May 14, 1972, and the end of the first week in June, John Vann laid the best part of 300 B-52 strikes in the environs of Kontum. For another, in the person of the 23rd ARVN Division commander, Colonel Ly Tong Ba (who as a captain had commanded the M113 troop at Ap Bac 10 years earlier), he had an ARVN commander who would stand and fight. On May 30, 1972, the North Vietnamese broke off their attack and withdrew into their Cambodian and Laotian sanctuaries.

Summers: Vann must have believed that his theories on how to fight the war had finally been vindicated.

Sheehan: It never occurred to him that he might just be postponing the end. Less than two weeks after the battle, John Paul Vann was killed when his helicopter crashed into a grove of trees sheltering a Montagnard cemetery. He died believing he had won his war.

Summers: What a tragic ending.

Sheehan: Yes, one of the tragedies of Vietnam was that in the end John Vann was also destroyed by the war. He did not see the fallacy in his victory. He did not see that in having to assume total control at the moment of crisis, he had proved the Saigon regime had no will of its own to survive. The only thing holding it up was John Paul Vann and the other advisers and the residual American military forces in the country. When they departed, the finale was only a matter of time. □

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WAR'S BITTER FINALE

In the confusion and panic came moments of honor, others of seeming betrayal. Heroes and innocents were left behind.

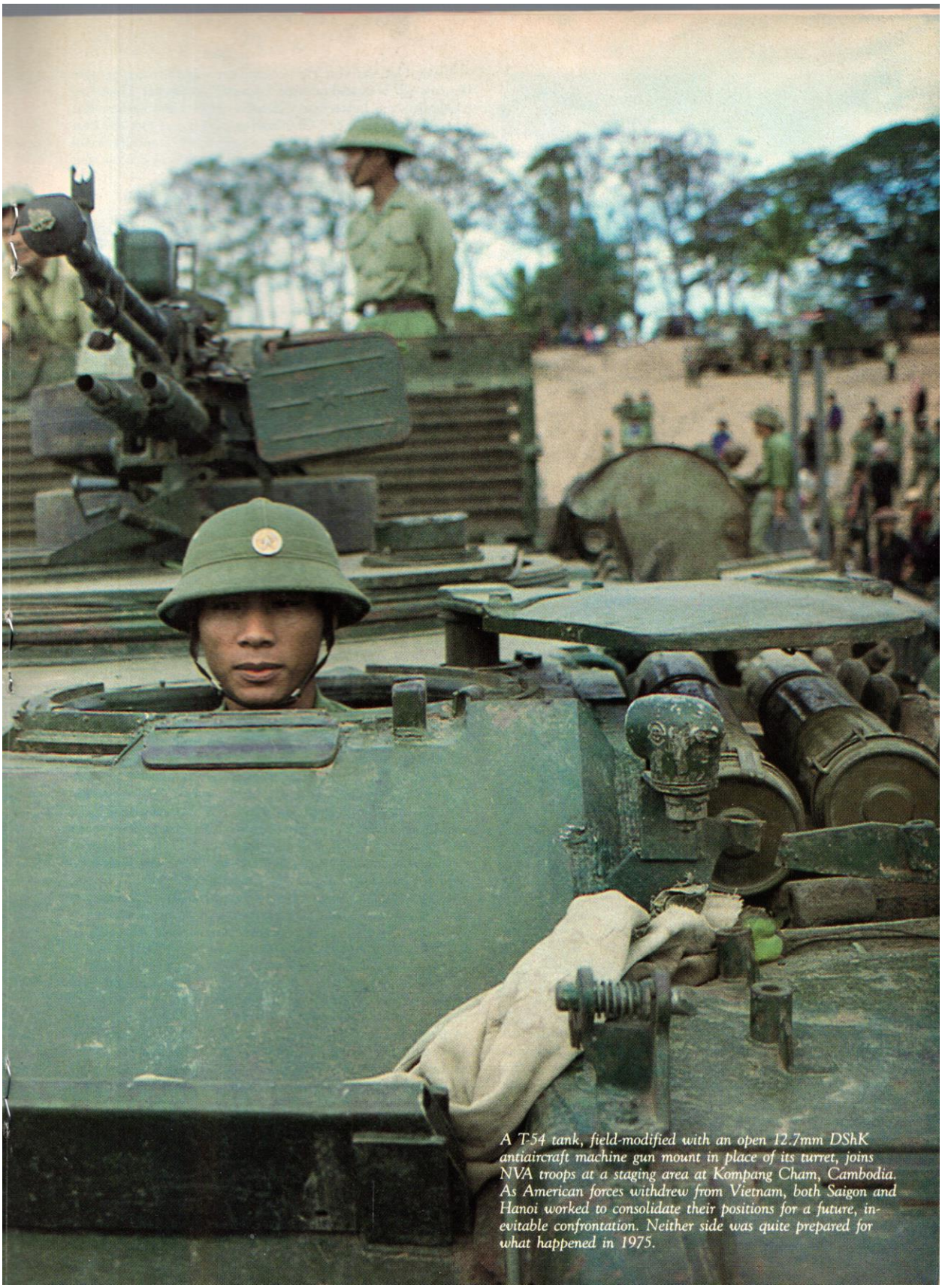
By Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr.

They're fighting our war! So said the fighter pilots from the USS *Coral Sea* as they returned to their carrier after flying air cover for the evacuation of Saigon on April 29 and 30, 1975. And they were exactly right. Now that the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) did not have the American military to contend with, the invaders from the north could throw away their cloak of insurgent war. The army advancing on Saigon bore little relationship to the black-pajama-clad guerrilla forces popular in the American imagination.

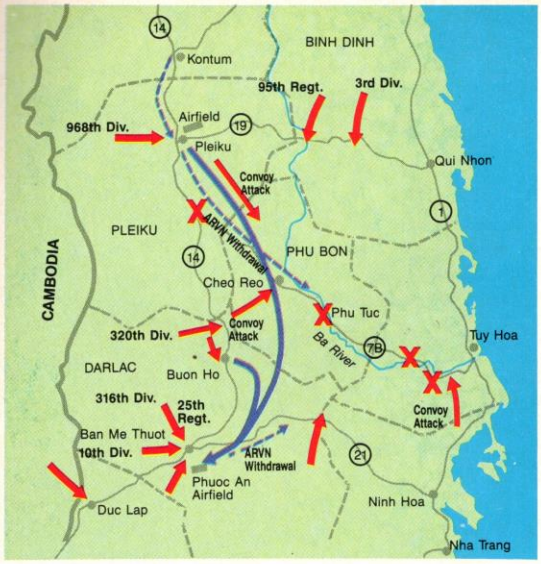
This 22-division North Vietnamese force was a modern army, equipped with tanks, antiaircraft missiles and heavy artillery. And it was executing a classic *blitzkrieg* right out of the pages of World War II. "Lightning speed, more lightning speed; boldness, more boldness." So said the posters in the war room of the North Vietnamese General Staff as its members planned the maneuver of their four Army corps.

As the North Vietnamese commander, Senior General Van Tien Dung, later related: "The Army II Corps, covering a distance of 900 kilometers, had been ordered to report in Bien Hoa in 18 days. All 2,000 vehicles of the army corps had to cross six big rivers while having to fight the enemy en route." In words that the German *blitzkrieg* expert Heinz Guderian would have found familiar, General Dung reported that "cadres of the front staff had to admit somewhat ruefully that they could not draw maps quickly enough to catch up with the advance of our forces."

The end bore more resemblance to the fall of France in 1940 than it did to any Vietnam-era notions of guerrilla insurgency. "The IV Corps, after capturing Xuan Loc, had closed in on the east," said General Dung in his after-action report. "From the southeast, the II Corps had already closed in on Long Thanh, Vung Tau, Nuoc Trong and Ba Ria. . . the 5th and 8th divisions had taken up positions [in the southwest] close to My Tho. . . from the northwestern and northern directions. . . the I and III Corps had already closed in on Dong Du, Cu Chi, Phu Loi, Binh Duong, Lai Khe and Ben Cat." The result was inevitable. At 1130 hours, 30 April 1975, Saigon surrendered.



A T-54 tank, field-modified with an open 12.7mm DShK antiaircraft machine gun mount in place of its turret, joins NVA troops at a staging area at Kompang Cham, Cambodia. As American forces withdrew from Vietnam, both Saigon and Hanoi worked to consolidate their positions for a future, inevitable confrontation. Neither side was quite prepared for what happened in 1975.



TOP: After stopping an ARVN offensive and eliminating the salient in Phuoc Long Province in December 1974-January 1975, the North Vietnamese Chief of Staff, Senior General Van Tien Dung, launched offensives in the central highlands, culminating in the hard-fought, pivotal Battle of Ban Me Thuot. When Ban Me Thuot finally fell to the Communists on March 15, President Nguyen Van Thieu ordered his northern-based forces south to concentrate his defenses—a misinterpreted maneuver that degenerated into a confused rout. ABOVE: Prelude to Exodus: an American civilian pilot tries to control refugees boarding his transport plane at Nha Trang, April 1.

Senior General Van Tien Dung had won the same gamble that his old boss and mentor, General Vo Nguyen Giap had tried with the Eastertide Offensive three years earlier. But where Dung had won, Giap had gambled and lost the best part of the entire North Vietnamese Army in a conventional cross-border offensive intended to strike the decisive blow that would end the war.

On March 30, 1972, with the launch of a coordinated three-pronged, multi-division attack at Quang Tri in I Corps, Kontum in II Corps and An Loc in III Corps, Giap sought to roll up the South Vietnamese Army in a series of mini Dien Bien Phu-type setpiece battles. His key assumption, the assumption upon which success depended, was that the Americans, whose ground combat forces were then almost totally withdrawn from Vietnam, would not reintervene.

But Giap had made a disastrous miscalculation.

Not only did the United States intervene with its firepower—especially the massive use of B52 bombing strikes to break up North Vietnamese attack formations—but it also intervened with its battlefield leadership. Indeed, it was the determination of American generals such as "Diamond Jim" Hollingsworth ("Danger 79er" of 1st Infantry Division fame) and Jack Merritt that made the difference at An Loc. And it was the grit provided by John Paul Vann that turned the tide at Kontum. Stiffened by American firepower and by American leadership, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) broke the back of the North Vietnamese attack in 1972.

Giap's miscalculation cost him more than 100,000 battlefield casualties, the loss of most of his tanks and heavy artillery—and his battlefield command. He was replaced by General Dung, then the North Vietnamese Army Chief of Staff, who had been one of Giap's division commanders at Dien Bien Phu 18 years earlier.

And it also appeared for a while that Giap's failure had cost North Vietnam the war. On January 27, 1973, less than six months after their battlefield defeats during the Eastertide Offensive, the North Vietnamese signed the so-called "Paris Peace Accords"—the "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam."

As subsequent events made clear, however, the "peace" accords were not an end to the war in Vietnam, but merely a prelude to its next phase. Seen in this light, it is obvious that the Paris accords gave North Vietnam several major advantages for this next phase. The most apparent advantage was that North Vietnam was not required to withdraw its regular armed forces from the south.

Although at the time their very existence was vehemently denied, the North Vietnamese in fact had 87,000 NVA regulars organized into seven infantry divisions in South Vietnam's I Corps region; 25,500 troops and three infantry divisions in II Corps; 24,600 troops and three infantry divisions in III Corps, and 17,000 and one division in IV Corps.

Perhaps even more important, they retained the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail that stretched southward from its beginnings in North Vietnam through the Laotian panhandle and the borders of Cambodia to the battlefields of South Vietnam. The term "trail" is misleading. As North Vietnamese General Dung himself described it: "The length of this route . . . is more than 20,000 km [12,500 miles]. The 8-meter [26.5 feet] -wide route of more than 1,000 km [625 miles] . . . is our pride. With 5,000 km [3,125 miles] of pipeline . . . we were capable of providing enough fuel for various battlefronts. More than 10,000 transportation vehicles were put on the road . . . ."

The Ho Chi Minh Trail gave the North Vietnamese the considerable military advantage of interior lines. To understand what this means, visualize South Vietnam as a bow (as in bow-and-arrow). The major north-south roads and railroads used by the South Vietnamese follow the curved coastline, which forms the bow. The Ho Chi Minh Trail, on the other

Wounded are evacuated from Xuan Loc, where the personnel of the 18th Division put up an exceptionally courageous defense, even as the rest of the ARVN and South Vietnam crumbled around them.

hand, is relatively straight and forms the bow-string. This meant that, by using the trail, North Vietnamese forces could move faster to any place in the interior of Vietnam than could their South Vietnamese opponents.

American helicopters had neutralized that advantage, but by 1975 American helicopter support was long gone. So were all American combat forces, which had been totally withdrawn in January 1973, in accordance with the terms of the Paris Accords. All that remained in Vietnam were the 50 U.S. military personnel of the Defense Attache Office (DAO) in Saigon, a number of American civilian technicans, and the small U.S. Delegation, Four Party Joint Military Team (FPJMT), set up to administer the terms of the Accords, especially the resolution of the POW/MIA issue.

To offset all of these disadvantages, and to gain South Vietnamese acceptance of the Paris Accords, President Richard Nixon had given South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu secret guarantees that the United States would definitely reintervene if North Vietnam flagrantly violated the terms of the Paris Accords. Given how badly they had been burned in 1972, it was this possibility of U.S. reintervention that particularly worried the North Vietnamese.

In October 1974, the NVA General Staff briefed the Political Bureau and the Central Military Party Committee on the military leadership's plan to conquer South Vietnam. The big question, as General Dung relates, was, "Would the United States be able to send its troops back to the south if we launched large-scale battles that would lead to the collapse of the puppet [sic] troops?"

Their conclusion was: "The Watergate scandal had seriously affected the entire United States and precipitated the resignation of an extremely reactionary president—Nixon. . . .U.S. aid to the Saigon puppet administration was decreasing. Comrade Le Duan [Ho Chi Minh's successor] drew an important conclusion that became a resolution: 'Having already withdrawn from the South, the United States could hardly jump back in, and no matter how it might intervene, it would be unable to save the Saigon administration from collapse.' "

But the North Vietnamese still weren't sure. On December 13, 1974, they tested the water with a limited-objective attack on Phuoc Long Province in northern III Corps. General Dung ordered the NVA 301 Corps to attack from its sanctuaries across the border in Cambodia to seize the provincial capital, Phuon Binh. Preceded by a 1,000-round artillery preparation and led by the tank-supported NVA 3rd and 7th Divisions, the attack was successful. On January 6, 1975, Phuoc Binh became the first South Vietnamese provincial capital to fall since the cease-fire of two years earlier.

But far more important than the seizure of a remote provincial capital was the reaction of the Americans. Not only did they not honor their secret guarantees to reintervene if the Paris Accords were flagrantly broken (and the Phuoc Long attack was deliberately designed to be flagrant), but the U.S. Congress further cut military aid to South Vietnam. It was not America's finest hour.

Encouraged by the lack of American response, the North Vietnamese launched their final offensive in earnest. Not surprisingly, one of their initial offensives was designed to do what they had failed to do in the battle of the Ia Drang Valley in 1965 and in the battle for Kontum in 1972—cut South Vietnam in half by driving across the Central Highlands from Cambodia to the sea.

General Dung began his attack with a three-division assault on Ban Me Thuot, a town in the Central Highlands just south of the Ia Drang Valley. Here the Ho Chi Minh Trail played an important role. In using that supply line to concentrate his forces, General Dung, in his own words, "achieved superiority over the enemy [i.e., the ARVN] in this area. As for infantry, the ratio was 5.5 of our troops for each enemy soldier. As for tanks and armored vehicles, the ratio was

1.2 to 1. In heavy artillery the ratio was 2.1 to 1."

On March 10, 1975, the attack on Ban Me Thuot began with three NVA divisions attacking the one regular regiment of the ARVN 23rd Division. Unwittingly, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu then played right into the enemy's hands. On March 14, he ordered the evacuation of the Central Highlands in order to concentrate his overextended army at the population centers located in enclaves along the seacoast. The most difficult of military operations to begin with, this withdrawal under fire soon turned into a rout.

General Dung had also launched another prong of his attack across the DMZ in I Corps, striking south along the coast. The withdrawal of the ARVN airborne division from the defenses there caused a gap in the South Vietnamese lines, and ARVN was unable to hold. By March 25, 1975, I Corps belonged to the NVA.

One week later, on March 31, 1975, the NVA 320th Division reached Tuy Hoa on the coast of the South China Sea. II Corps also had ceased to exist. The corps commander, General Pham Van Phu, who had fled to Saigon, was placed under house arrest for his part in the debacle. On April 30, 1975, after placing his family on an American evacuation plane, General Phu committed suicide.

After the fall of II Corps, the North Vietnamese Army concentrated its entire attention on III Corps. At Xuan Loc, the NVA met its most determined opposition of the entire campaign. The capital of Long Khanh Province, the city of Xuan Loc, is 40 miles northeast of Saigon. At the time it was defended by the ARVN 18th Division. Formerly the 10th ARVN Division, it was renamed because it had become known as the "Number 10" (i.e. worst) Division, a nickname it bitterly resented, and, as events were to prove, one that it did not deserve.

On March 17, 1975, the 18th ARVN Division at Xuan Loc came under attack by the 6th and 7th NVA Divisions. Their attack was repulsed, but on April 9, 1975, the NVA 341st Division joined the attack. After an artillery barrage of some 4,000 rounds and supported by Soviet-supplied medium tanks, the NVA again struck the South Vietnamese defenses. But again the 18th ARVN Division held.

On April 15, the North Vietnamese reinforced their 6th, 7th and 341st Divisions with their 325th Division and moved their 10th and 304th Divisions into position. Under constant attack by four NVA Divisions, the 18th ARVN Division finally gave ground on April 17. The South Vietnamese had held for nearly a month and had virtually destroyed three NVA divisions, but the 18th Division's valiant stand was to be the last major battle of the Vietnam War.

In the meantime, the concern of U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin was twofold. First, he had to shore up the confidence of the South Vietnamese leaders as best he could, in order to preclude a total political collapse. And in this regard, the U.S. government was not much help. Congress had turned its back on Vietnam, and President Gerald Ford refused to invoke the guarantees made by Richard M. Nixon.

Instead, Ford made a show of support by dispatching then-Army Chief of Staff General Fred C. Weyand to Vietnam for a first-hand look. But when General Weyand completed his mission, all that was accomplished was reluctant congressional approval to use U.S. military forces for the "Saigon evacuation."

That evacuation was Ambassador Martin's second concern. He knew that he had to begin early to evacuate as many American workers and their dependents as he could. But if he did so too openly, he risked undermining the confidence of the South Vietnamese leaders and also risked precipitating a panic like the one that had occurred in Danang in the hours before that city fell to the NVA. Conditions there became so chaotic that the evacuation had to be canceled and key South Vietnamese personnel abandoned.

Attempts to quietly move people out of the country came to tragedy on April 4, 1975, when a USAF C5A evacuation transport crashed at the Tan Son Nhut airfield at Saigon, killing a number of Vietnamese orphans and 37 female civilian employees of the U.S. Embassy and Defense Attache Office, as well as several dependents of U.S. personnel stationed in Saigon.

All the while, liaison flights between Saigon and Hanoi—under the auspices of the Paris Accord's Four Party Joint Military Team—continued to be flown. The last such flight was made on April 25, 1975, five days before the fall of Saigon. Knowing that while in Hanoi the North Vietnamese would dictate the terms of the U.S. withdrawal, the U.S. Chief Negotiator asked his Embassy superiors for the U.S. position. "Damned if I know," was the reply. "So what should I do?" the U.S. negotiator then asked. The answer was, "Do the best you can." It was a perfect example of the ad hoc way in which the entire war had been conducted.

In Hanoi, the terms indeed were clearly stated. "The U.S. Defense Attache Office must go in its entirety. The U.S. Delegation, Four Party Joint Military Team must stay. And the U.S. Embassy must work out its own future."

Upon his return to Saigon, the U.S. negotiator complained to the Secretary of Defense's representative there that this was the most "screwed up" situation in which he ever had been placed. "I could have given them a nuclear ultimatum and they would have believed me," he said, to which the reply was, "Why didn't you?"

On April 29, 1975, the North Vietnamese made their final move with a rocket attack on Tan Son Nhut airbase, an action that brought a halt to the fixed-wing evacuation of U.S. personnel, their dependents and selected South Vietnamese officials that had been going on since the beginning of the month. Several of the rockets fell short, one caving in the wall of the Defense Attache's quarters and the other killing two U.S. Marine guards.

Operation Frequent Wind was ordered into execution. This

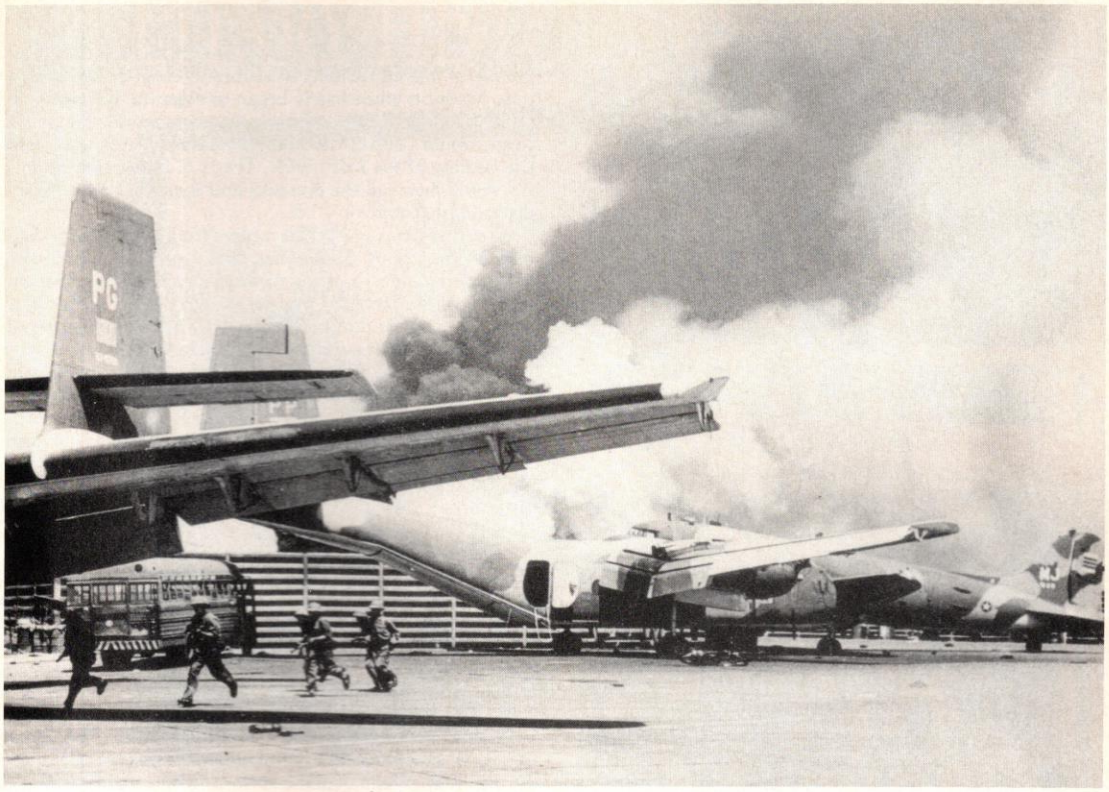
GUERRILLAS OR GRUNTS?

Was Vietnam an insurgent war, or was it a conventional war cleverly disguised as an insurgency? Was it won by grunts or by guerrillas? Oddly enough, those questions are as debatable in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as they are here in America.

One of the major criticisms of American military strategy in Vietnam is that it did not focus on counterinsurgency. In particular, General William C. Westmoreland, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) Commander from 1964 to 1968, has been singled out for his "search and destroy" tactics and for fighting a "big unit" war.

In academia during the Kennedy years, formulating esoteric counterinsurgency theories was practically a cottage industry. Thus, much of the criticism can be considered sour grapes by those whose advice was ignored. But there are serious studies of this issue, most notably Army Major Andrew F. Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam*. Krepinevich, formerly an assistant professor of political science at the United States Military Academy, examined the record and found that despite a lot of lip service, the Army really did not seriously pursue a counterinsurgency strategy in Vietnam.

But even if his findings are accepted, many still question whether the war was a guerrilla war in the first place. Among them is retired State Depart-



The South Vietnamese Air Force was woefully ineffective in stopping the Communists, who added insult to injury by attacking Tan Son Nhut airbase with three captured aircraft. Here, NVA troops overrun a burning Tan Son Nhut.

was the code name for the evacuation of U.S. Embassy and military personnel and selected Vietnamese civilians from Saigon. Conducted by Task Force 76 of the U.S. 7th Fleet with the aircraft carriers *Enterprise* and *Coral Sea* of Task Force 77 providing air cover, the operation began at 11:08 a.m. local time on April 29, 1975. The prime evacuation site was at the Defense Attache Office at Tan Son Nhut airbase in the suburbs of Saigon. Known during the war as "Pentagon East," this was the former headquarters of MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam).

During the next 10 hours, Marine helicopters evacuated some 5,000 U.S. civilian and military personnel and South Vietnamese. At 9 p.m., the evacuation there was terminated and the Defense Attache Office, which had been previously wired for destruction by a Marine Corps demolition team, was destroyed. Meanwhile, that morning, the U.S. Delegation, Four Party Joint Military Team, had moved from the Defense Attache Office area at Tan Son Nhut to the U.S. Embassy in downtown Saigon. Based on the information received in Hanoi on April 25, both the Four Party Joint Military Team and the U.S. Embassy originally intended to stay in Vietnam after the fall of Saigon. It was not until mid-morning on April 29, that Washington ordered *all* Americans out of Vietnam.

The U.S. Delegation by then was reduced to three Army officers, Colonel John Madison, then-Lieutenant Colonel Harry Summers and Captain Stuart Herrington, and three non-commissioned officers, Army Master Sergeant William Herron, Army Specialist 7 William Bell and Marine Gunnery Sergeant Ernest Pace. And they now found some 2,000 refugees jammed within the embassy walls. Since evacuation plans called only for the evacuation of some 100 em-

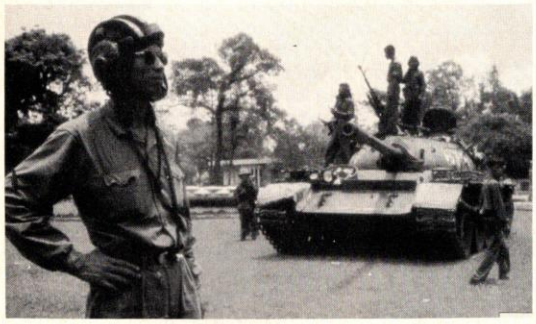
ment Foreign Service Officer Norman B. Hannah, who argues persuasively in his 1987 work, *The Key to Failure: Laos and the Vietnam War*, that "in South Vietnam we responded mainly to Hanoi's simulated insurgency rather than to its real, but controlled, aggression—as a bull charges the toreador's cape, not the toreador."

Those who saw the North Vietnamese "toreador" in all his splendor slashing his way through South Vietnam in the spring of 1975 tend to agree with Hannah's assessment. There was not much of a guerrilla war in the 22 North Vietnamese regular divisions.

And it was not just Hannah's assessment that regular forces were decisive. North Vietnamese Senior General Van Tien Dung, who commanded North Vietnam's final offensive, said the same thing. His book, *Great Spring Victory*, scarcely mentions the role of the Viet Cong and gives all the credit for the "liberation" of South Vietnam to the North Vietnamese Army.

As in the United States, however, not all agreed. Lieutenant General Tran Van Tra, who as deputy commander of COSVN (Central Office of South Vietnam) directed Viet Cong operations in South Vietnam, wrote a book, *Ending the 30-Year War*, which claimed it was actually the Viet Cong guerrillas who won the war.

While the debate may be similar, the reaction to it was not. In Vietnam, Tra's publisher was reportedly executed for publishing his book, and General Tra himself was sent into forced retirement.



TOP: As Communists close in on Saigon, an ARVN M-113 APC retreats south towards the capital. MIDDLE: High noon, April 30: T-54 No. 843 of the 203rd ("Huong Giang") Armored Regiment, the first tank through the gate, covers troops as they enter the Presidential Palace bearing Viet Cong flags—a pretense soon to vanish as "reunification" begins in earnest. In ironic coincidence, the first flag-waving NVA soldier in the palace was named Nguyen Van Thieu. ABOVE: On the grounds of the Presidential Palace, a weary but jubilant NVA tanker savors the moment.

bassy personnel, there was much concern over what was to be done.

After the Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Wolfgang Lehmann, placed Colonel Madison in charge of the evacuation, Madison immediately began to organize the withdrawal. The senior Marine officer in the compound, Major Jim Kean, would control the Marine security guards and direct the landing of the helicopters. The U.S. Delegation personnel would marshall the evacuees and then load them on the departing helicopters.

After first clearing all the evacuees from the Embassy compound proper and shepherding them into the neighboring Embassy recreation compound, a helicopter landing zone was created on the Embassy grounds for the heavier CH-53's, in addition to the landing pad for CH-46's on the Embassy roof. Throughout the day and far into the night the evacuees were broken down into 70-person loads and loaded onto the Marine helicopters for evacuation to the ships lying offshore.

At 4:15 a.m., April 30, Colonel Madison informed Lehmann that only six more helicopter lifts were required to complete the evacuation of the Embassy. But it was not to be. Washington had canceled the lift. Members of the U.S. Delegation were forced to break their vows that all the evacuees would in fact be evacuated.

Among the 420 evacuees abandoned were personnel of the Korean CIA contingent, who deliberately had stayed until last to allow civilians to be evacuated and who now would be left to the tender mercies of the North Vietnamese. Also, a German priest, a number of refugee children, and the Embassy firemen, who had evacuated their families but themselves had volunteered to stay until the end in case of a helicopter crash. No Americans were knowingly left behind.

In addition to the formal evacuation, South Vietnamese Air Force aircraft loaded with aircrews and their families made for the fleet. Ships of the task force recovered 41 such aircraft, and another 54 were thrown over the side to make way for incoming U.S. evacuation helicopters.

The aerial exodus was complemented by a tide of junks, sampans and other small craft, as well as barges towed by tugs of the Military Sealift Command. More than 30,000 Vietnamese sailors and their families were also carried to safety by a South Vietnamese Navy flotilla. On May 2, 1975, Task Force 75 set sail for reception centers in the Philippines and Guam with some 80,000 evacuees.

One poignant postnote remains to be told. The last South Vietnamese attack of the war was made on April 30, 1975, by VNAF (South Vietnamese Air Force) A-37 jet bombers from Binh Tuy airbase in IV Corps. Striking NVA tank columns entering Saigon, the planes then flew to U Tapao airbase in Thailand to avoid capture. On May 1, 1975, the IV Corps Commander, Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khoa Nam, and his deputy, Maj. Gen. Le Van Hung, committed suicide rather than surrender to the communists. □

Now editor of Vietnam *Magazine, Colonel Summers was Chief of the Negotiations Division, U.S. Delegation, Four Party Joint Military Team, during his second tour in Vietnam in 1974-75. He traveled to Hanoi on April 25, 1975, to obtain North Vietnam's terms for the American evacuation and was one of the last American soldiers evacuated from the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon on the morning of April 30, 1975.*

As further reading, he suggests as the best work on the fall of Saigon, Stuart Herrington's Peace With Honor? *Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1983. The best account of the final months of South Vietnam, Colonel William E. Le Gro's* Vietnam From Cease-fire to Capitulation. *Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981. See also Arnold H. Isaacs'* Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia. *Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.*

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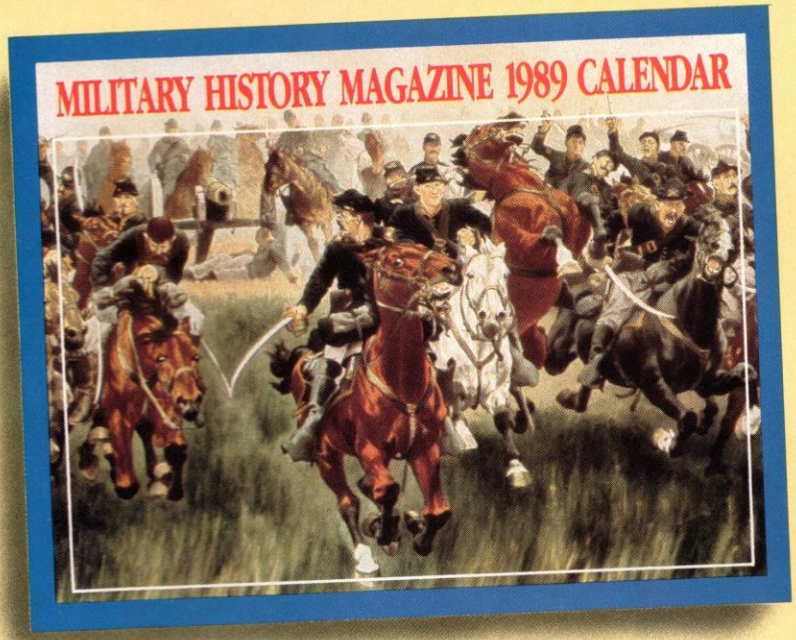

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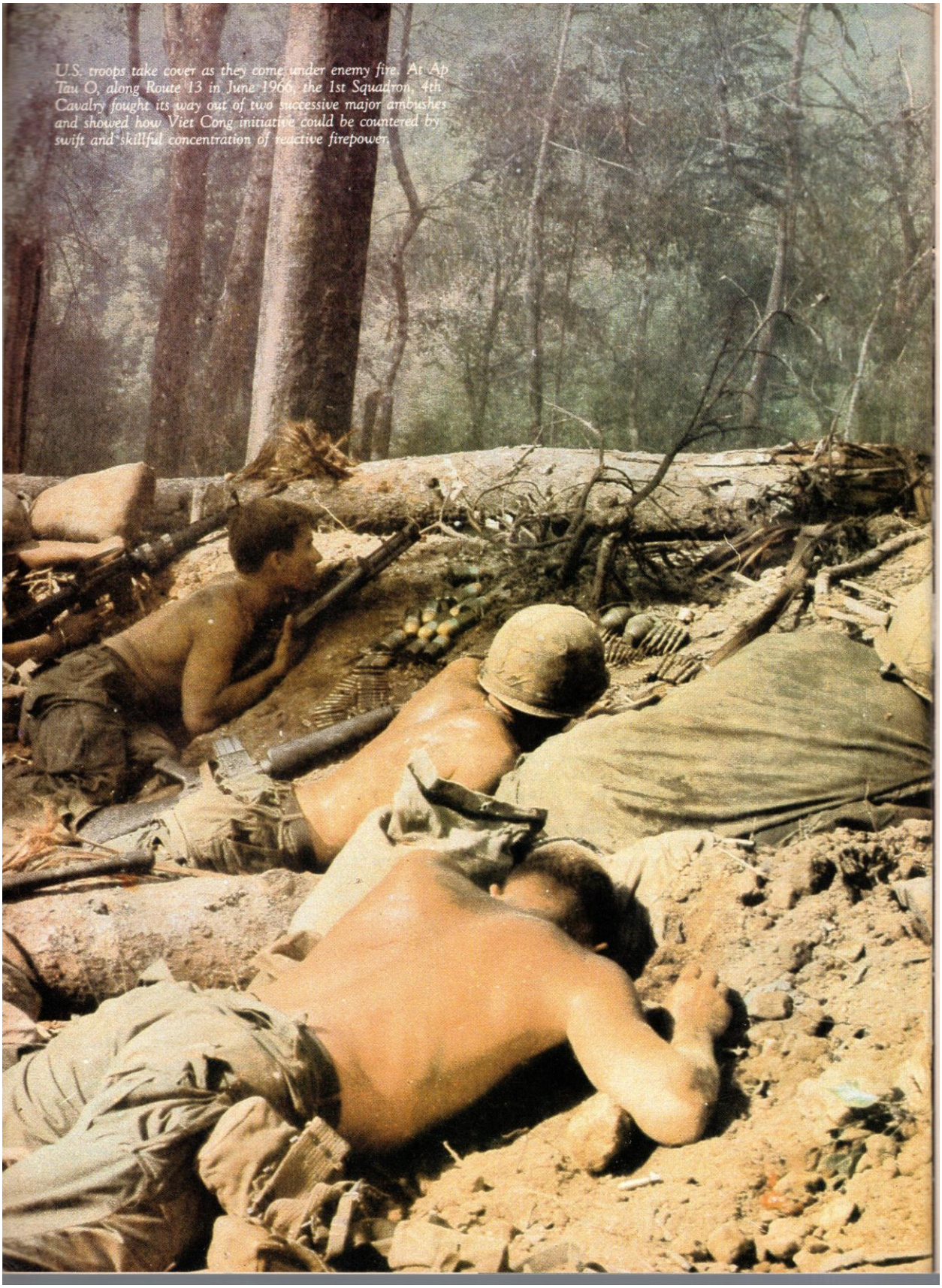


U.S. troops take cover as they come under enemy fire. At Ap Tau O, along Route 13 in June 1966, the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry fought its way out of two successive major ambushes and showed how Viet Cong initiative could be countered by swift and skillful concentration of reactive firepower.

DOUBLE AMBUSH ON ROUTE 13

Not one, but two ambushes would be set up to greet the deploying armored cavalry of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division in a test of strength along National Route 13 in Binh Long Province.

By John M. Carland

Whether American armored cavalry could hold its own against the Viet Cong was a burning question in May of 1966. And June would provide the answer—in the form of two battles fought by the U.S. 1st Infantry Division, at Ap Tau O and at Srok Dong.

Both battles took place on National Route 13, a major north-south highway in Binh Long Province, and were part of a larger campaign by the 1st Infantry to thwart the enemy's Monsoon Offensive (supposed to run from mid-May through mid-August). By aggressively seeking out the Viet Cong, the Division commander, Maj. Gen. William DePuy, hoped to take the war to the enemy and hurt him badly. During his campaign, called El Paso II, the 1st Infantry would fight, on separate occasions, regiments of the 9th Viet Cong Division—the 271st, 272nd, and the 273rd. Battles with the 271st and 272nd would be led by cavalry units of the First Infantry Division on June 8 and June 30.

Paradoxically, each battle was the result of a VC ambush, and one doesn't stretch the truth by saying that the Viet Cong were masters of the ambush—so much so that in their technique they almost turned the ambush into a work of art. Their planning-and-execution approach was the "one slow, four quick" formula. The first step, the slow one, dictated that the commander and his aides, without haste and very thoroughly, plan the ambush. The commander would study the enemy, the proposed location of the ambush, and plan the actual assault. In many cases he might actually visit the proposed area to personally check out possible locations for bunkers, gun positions, mines and troop deployment. The commander would also prepare routes to move his troops to the battlefield and withdrawal routes to move them out when the ambush was over.

Next, the commander and his men would pull back to a safe area and rehearse the ambush until all unit leaders and each individual knew the terrain, his job, and the general situation. Last, came the execution ("four quick") phase. The Viet Cong now advanced quickly to the battle area and then, assuming that their timing was good (it usually was because of their very capable intelligence organization), they would go directly into the second ("quick") step—assault quickly.

After the actual ambush, or whenever the commander had decided the time had come, the Viet Cong would clear the battlefield quickly. They would carry off anything in the way of weapons, ammunition and supplies that might be useful in the future, destroying what they could not carry. Finally they would also carry off their dead and wounded. This led into the fourth quick step—withdraw as fast as possible along previously selected escape routes.

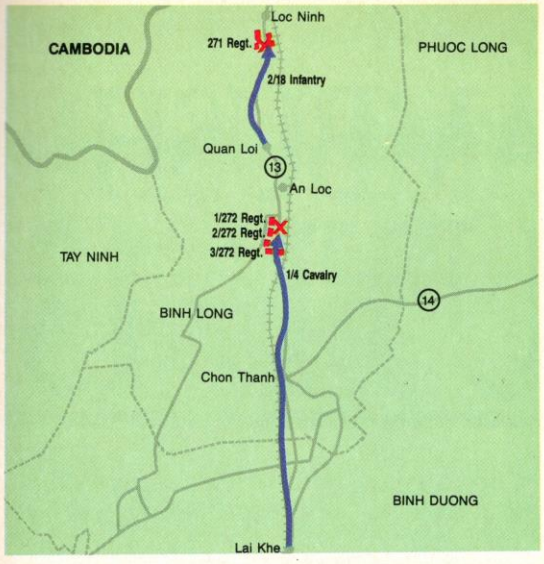
In mid 1966 it was clear that the Americans in South Vietnam had yet to devise a consistently successful way of dealing with such attacks. The experience gained in El Paso II in June and July of 1966 would provide some improvement.

The events that triggered the first major battle of El Paso II, the Battle of Ap Tau O on Route 13, began to unfold early in the morning of June 8, 1966. Troop A, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, left its base camp at Phu Loi—moving north to the provincial capital of An Loc. The troop was made up of 135 men and 41 armored vehicles—nine M48 tanks, 29 armored cavalry assault vehicles (ACAVs), including two flame-throwing vehicles and two radar vehicles, plus two engineer "dozer" tanks, and one armored recovery vehicle.

Troop A was commanded by Captain Ralph Sturgis, whose three platoons moved northwards in inverted order—the 3rd Platoon first and the 1st last. The convoy's purpose was to place the squadron armor more centrally for operational use in El Paso II—to help protect against an expected Viet Cong attack on An Loc. As a routine precaution the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry (2/18), acting as a ready-reaction force, was flown from its base camp to Lai Khe on the morning of June 8. It would be well located to react to any contact made by Captain Sturgis' road column.

Because the enemy's penchant for mining Route 13 was well known, the convoy at first traveled on the abandoned roadbed of an old French railway and on dirt paths in hopes of a safer ride. (After all, the enemy would hardly lay mines beneath a no-longer-used roadbed or on dirt paths—or so it was hoped.) The roadbed and dirt paths ran roughly parallel to Route 13.

Troop A reached the intermediate destination of Lai Khe at 11 a.m. At Lai Khe, headquarters of the 3rd Brigade, the



TOP: The 272nd VC Regiment sprung an L-shaped ambush along Route 13, but blundered in stringing its units out too far, reducing their flexibility of maneuver both to attack or to escape. ABOVE: "Angelique d'Morte," an M-113 of the 4th Cavalry halts during Operation Cedar Falls, January 1967. Note supporting M-48 tank on the road behind it.

soldiers of Troop A took their lunch while the tanks and ACAVs refueled. The troop then left Lai Khe on Route 13, but quickly abandoned the highway for the relative safety of the railway roadbed. The troop's journey northward continued without incident to Chon Thanh, capital of Chon Thanh District.

As Troop A arrived at Chon Thanh, the 2/18 moved by helicopter from its own earlier stop at Lai Khe to Hon Quan airfield at An Loc, so as to be better positioned to provide assistance should Troop A need it. As further safety precaution, a trail party was left behind at Chon Thanh and would catch up later.

The troop now found it slow going off the highway. After it reached and passed through Chon Thanh, the jungle foliage made traveling and defending against a potential ambush so difficult that Troop A—balancing safety against the need to move on—returned to Route 13. The 135 men of Troop A were now on the last leg of their journey to An Loc—and, although they did not know it, just about to enter the killing zone of an enemy ambush.

Strung out along the west side of Route 13, from the village of Ap Tau O to a point about three kilometers to the north, the 272nd regiment of the 9th Viet Cong Division was waiting for the Americans. The VC had dug in the previous night and formed an L-shaped ambush. A small number of the guerrillas positioned themselves on the east side of the road. From north to south the regiment's 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions massed along Route 13, while the regiment's reconnaissance company arranged itself across the base of the L. The location was just beyond, or at the maximum range of, nearby friendly artillery. The Viet Cong commander and his staff had selected an excellent place for an ambush. They also had fulfilled another Viet Cong tactical requirement—substantial and in this case enormous, numerical superiority over the Americans. In addition, the American cavalry troop was strung out for almost three kilometers.

Accounts differ as to precisely when and how the battle began. Most likely, it was about 2:30 p.m. when a recoilless rifle or a mine (or both) hit the column's lead tank and triggered the ambush. Immediately, according to the cavalry squadron's annual historical report, "the entire column came under intense small arms, automatic weapons, mortar and recoilless rifle fire." The logical next step would have been for the Viet Cong to attempt overrunning the column. However, a captured enemy document indicates that the U.S. troops reacted so quickly that the VC were themselves pinned down by heavy American fire. Within Troop A, the 3rd Platoon came under the most intense fire, the 2nd Platoon received less intense fire, and the trailing 1st Platoon suffered hardly any.

Captain Sturgis, whose command ACAV was in the middle of the column, quickly began moving toward its head. As he did, the left side of his vehicle received a direct hit from a recoilless rifle. With no great damage done, he continued. Then a second recoilless-rifle team began taking a bead on Sturgis' ACAV. Fortunately, the commander of an American M132 flame-thrower vehicle saw the VC team and quickly turned his weapon on the guerrillas, with devastating results. Sturgis was saved.

In the confusion surrounding the first minutes of battle the troopers could not ascertain the origin of enemy fire—the east or west side of the road. Third Platoon's vehicles automatically went into a herringbone formation so as to cover both sides. The 2nd Platoon meanwhile, acting on Sturgis' order, moved up to reinforce the lead 3rd Platoon, while the 1st Platoon, much farther back, began moving toward the sounds of gunfire. Shortly thereafter it became clear that almost all enemy fire came from west of the road, from an area of trees and secondary growth about a hundred meters back. Sturgis ordered his men to organize the vehicles into a circular defensive perimeter—a laager—on a slight rise a bit to the right, i.e. east, of the highway. Almost simultaneously he called for air support through the on-station Forward Air Controller (FAC), Captain Richard Wetzel. Within 11 minutes the first USAF flight had arrived.

The situation was fluid for a while, as the inevitable confusion that attends the start—and sometimes all—of a battle prevailed. Even though Sturgis had ordered the formation of a laager, it could not—because elements of his Troop extended along 3,000 meters of Route 13—be accomplished immediately. As the 1st Platoon attempted to make its way toward the laager area, its commander Lieutenant Louis Bouault, noticed a large number of Viet Cong moving parallel to his platoon. Presumably from the 272nd's Second Battalion, they presented an inviting target. Bouault ordered his men to open fire, which they did, causing a good number of casualties among the advancing Viet Cong. Indeed, his fire caused the enemy to attack his own platoon. In the ensuing fight one ACAV was damaged and another destroyed. However, Bouault's platoon, now within 500 to 800 meters of the laager, continued on and soon reached the laager's southern edge. There, he attached his platoon to the rest of the troop. As vehicles in the now-completed defensive perimeter continued firing, the laager obviously became the main focus of enemy attention. Although it is unlikely that the Viet Cong so intended, the battle, in the main, soon became one of fire, not

maneuver, and a pattern of static conflict emerged.

At this point the enemy commander had two options—retreat or stay and inflict as much damage and take as many American lives as possible. The American armored force, on the other hand, had three options—attack, retreat or stand pat. Given the substantial firepower of an armored cavalry troop, one might have expected the option of attack. The squadron commander, Lt. Col. Leonard Lewane was overhead in his helicopter throughout the battle—he in fact landed and walked the perimeter twice. In addition, the 3rd Brigade commander and both assistant divisional commanders and the division commander, General DePuy, were all kept abreast of events. None ordered an attack, and in the division's after-action report, that decision was indirectly criticized.

Regarding the second option, meanwhile, there was obviously no reason to retreat. Not only is an armored cavalry troop in and of itself a powerful entity, but in this case the Air Force presence made it certain that the troop would not be overrun. Further, the 2/18th Infantry was at An Loc as a ready-reaction force. Additionally, elements of the 5th ARVN (South Vietnamese) Division at An Loc were ready to move south on Route 13 to reinforce Troop A.

As it turned out, the option chosen was to stand pat. Troop A in its own defensive perimeter with its own tanks and ACAVs—in conjunction with the Air Force and, to a lesser degree, artillery—blasted away at the enemy in the woods across Route 13 for hours. In the late afternoon the Viet Cong commander decided his troops had inflicted—and absorbed—all the damage they could. He began withdrawing to the west, effectively to end the main portion of the battle.

At an earlier lull, Captain Sturgis had ordered the trail party, under the command of his executive officer, Lieutenant Ronald Copes, to leave Chon Thanh, where it had stayed when the rest of the troop moved on toward An Loc. On reaching the southern edge of the battle area, it was to pick up any tank or other Troop A vehicle that had been dropped off along the way. While so engaged, the trail party itself encountered a small ambush, set up by the VC 3rd/272, which resulted in the loss of an American tank to a recoilless rifle—possibly the only time that the 272nd's 3rd Battalion participated in the battle. With the aid of close air support, the trail party drove the enemy away in a firefight that lasted about 30 minutes and then proceeded to link up with the main body of Troop A.

Meanwhile the 2/18th was ordered, as the ready-reaction force, to the battle area to relieve and reinforce Troop A. Since the closest landing zone (LZ) was four miles to the north, by the time the helicopter-lifted battalion landed and swept down to the battle area, the enemy had withdrawn. The ARVN units, coming south on Route 13 by truck, also arrived too late to be of materiel assistance.

Troop A and the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry, remained near the battle site overnight. On June 9, they policed the battlefield and then moved on to Hon Quan to provide security for an artillery battery and the divisional command post being established there.

The Air Force contribution to repulse off the ambush had been a key factor. Not only did a flight arrive just minutes after the ambush opened, but air sorties consisting of 17 flights of bombers delivered 27 tons of high explosives and napalm, six tons of fragmentation bombs and 24 canisters of cluster bomb units over the next several hours. On the few occasions when the Air Force did not have a flight on station, helicopter gunships filled the void. In short, the enemy was under constant bombardment from 11 minutes after he triggered the ambush until he began disengaging. For the most part, the Air Force pounded the area to the immediate west of the troop's perimeter. The 3rd Brigade's after-action report gave generous praise—"Close air support was considered the decisive factor in the success of the battle on June 8 along Highway 13." There were still some rough spots to be worked out in the procedures by which tactical air support could help the 1st Infantry, but basically the job had been done well.

TOP: Already masters of ambush, the Viet Cong quickly developed methods of dealing with U.S. armor, using mines, recoilless rifles and rockets. Here, having successfully overrun a small enemy column, VC sappers pillage a disabled M-113 for anything useful. ABOVE: At Ap Tau O, the 272nd Regiment was unable to overrun the Americans when they suddenly found themselves under fire—in at least one case, literally, from an M-132 "Zippo" flamethrower.

Evaluating the battle later, the planners saw an engagement which started as an ambush and continued long enough to become a fierce fire fight. At its end, 14 Americans were dead and approximately 40 wounded. The enemy had taken much higher casualties—approximately 100 killed in action (by body count), with an additional 200 to 250 estimated killed, and doubtlessly a large number of wounded. On balance the Americans saw the engagement as a success. The 1st VC Battalion had suffered 90 percent casualties and the 2nd Battalion, 50 percent. (The 3rd Battalion had been considerably south of the main attack and only participated in peripheral action. This accounts for its having only minimal casualties.)

At the very beginning, a VC mistake helped Troop A. The Viet Cong laid out the ambush in such a way that their own lines extended for at least three kilometers. Over-extended, the enemy could not easily maneuver against Troop A once the ambush was triggered. But the Americans also made mistakes. The divisional after-action report makes it clear that, instead of going into a tight circular defensive perimeter as soon as the battle began, Troop A should have maneuvered and attacked aggressively. Among other improvements adopted, the report disclosed "Communications were tightened up,

A USAF F-100 streaks in for a close-support bombing run. Eighty-eight sorties were flown to assist the 4th Cavalry, who also were aided by 8-inch and 155mm artillery. Although the Communists managed to escape the trap, they took galling losses before they could disengage.

the coordination of air and artillery was improved by the simple means of preplanning artillery support on one side of the road and air support on the other so these two decisive weapons could be used continuously and simultaneously. It was also decided that the infantry reaction would be divided into two elements. First, a battlefield relief force to preclude a defeat in the area of the main attack, and second, a battlefield-exploitation force which would be landed along the routes of withdrawal in order to destroy VC forces some distance from the ambush site." Members of the division at all levels felt that the enemy had been soundly defeated in the battle at Ap Tau O, but they also felt that important lessons had been learned. The 1st Infantry battles fought later in the same campaign seem to bear this out.

Since the battle at Ap Tau O on June 8, 1st Squadron, Fourth Cavalry (1/4) had spent its time securing the division base at Quan Loi and the Hon Quan airfield while also performing reconnaissance around Hon Quan. Reconnaissance to the north had been limited by a destroyed bridge a few kilometers beyond Hon Quan. After laying down a temporary armored-vehicle-launched bridge (AVLB) across the stream, the 1/4th embarked on its own mission that day. The squadron's plan, approved by its commander Lewane, had more than one objective. After the bridge had been put in place, Troops B and C would proceed north on Route 13, conducting reconnaissance-in-force operations in order to find the enemy or to obtain intelligence in selected areas adjacent to the highway. Troop B would have a special responsibility in that it was charged with escorting equipment from Loc Ninh back to Hon Quan. Elements of C Company, 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry (2/18), were attached to the squadron; First Platoon would go with Troop B and the rest with Troop C. The hope was that the planned actions would somehow, according to the official battle narrative, "deceive the enemy as to the actual area in which the division was planning to operate in the near future." The idea also was that the various deployments would be completed within a single day, at the end of which Troops B and C would return to Hon Quan. Events overtook that expectation.

Starting on a hot and clear morning, the column—Troop B in the lead, followed by Troop C, both with attached elements of C/2/18—made its way up Route 13. The force entered the area of likely combat shortly after 9 a.m. After moving a couple of kilometers farther, Troop C turned to the west on Route 17, heading toward its assigned area of operation, while Troop B, after a brief reconnaissance to the east, continued northward. The place where the troops separated was designated Checkpoint 1. Troop Bs order of march was: 3rd Platoon; Troop Command Group; 2nd Platoon and 1st Platoon. Immediately beyond the checkpoint, just south of the village of Srok Dong, Troop B, in ignorance, began entering the enemy's killing zone.

The enemy unit waiting to spring the trap was the 271st Viet Cong Regiment, 9th Viet Cong Division. The regiment, formed in 1961 in Tay Ninh Province, initially consisted of two battalions. The following year a third battalion was added, and in 1965 became a part of the newly formed 9th Viet Cong Division.

The enemy had carefully selected and prepared the ambush site. It was a modified L-shaped ambush. The stem of the L began on the west side of Route 13 a short distance north of Checkpoint 1, continued for approximately 2,000 meters, and worked its way around the western side of a rice paddy that lay across Route 13. Most of the men and the heavy weapons were on the west side of the road. The base of the L extended across the highway to just beyond the rice paddy—logs strewn about this area provided good cover for the Viet Cong. A smaller group of the enemy was stationed along the east side of Route 13. Open areas in the ambush consisted of the rice paddy and small bodies of water. Otherwise the area was heavily forested, with trees 150 to 200 feet in height. Where there were no trees or water, waist-high grass seemed to be the dominant terrain feature. In short, the area offered more than adequate concealment.

As the tail end of Troop B passed Checkpoint 1, the Troop's lead vehicle, a bit more than 2,000 meters ahead and about halfway through the rice paddy, began receiving small-arms, recoilless-rifle and mortar fire. The time was approximately 9:45 a.m. The 2nd Platoon came forward quickly and deployed around the 3rd Platoon, and all began firing into the forest at the enemy. Colonel Lewane, overhead in his command helicopter, quickly arranged to divert a nearby and in-progress airstrike to bomb and strafe the enemy. Meanwhile, the fire intensified on both sides. Within 30 minutes, the enemy had disabled all four of B Troop's tanks. At this point in the engagement, there were two centers of action—the area near the head of the column and the area around Checkpoint 1, now defended by the 1st Platoon of Troop B. As the number of American wounded grew, they began to assemble at Checkpoint 1 to be evacuated by medical helicopter. The high level of enemy fire made this impossible, and the wounded had to be carried by armored personnel carrier to a safer area south of the checkpoint, where the helicopters could land safely.

Indeed, enemy fire had become so heavy as to fear that 1st Platoon might be cut off from the rest of the Troop. An airstrike near its position lowered the intensity of enemy fire, but 1st Platoon still needed help and called for Troop C. One platoon of Troop C already was close to Checkpoint 1, while the others were about 1,500 meters to the west. Troop C's tracked vehicles answered the enemy's mortar and recoilless rifle fire with .50-caliber fire and sent platoons to push out the perimeter, mostly to the north. This done, the intense fire on the increasingly crowded checkpoint diminished.

Next, Squadron Commander Lewane directed Troop C to push forward to the other center of pressure on the troopers there. Second Platoon, 1st Platoon and Troop Command Group—in that order—proceeded to carry out the order, while 3rd Platoon remained at Checkpoint 1. The enemy, from his well-protected position, fired continuously at this moving

column. The armored personnel carriers and the one tank with Troop C, however, maintained a heavy base of fire as they moved toward Troop B's positions. The tank was hit twice in the column's advance but managed to keep moving and firing. About 150 to 200 meters short of the rice paddy, the troop stopped and took up positions on both sides of the road. Its commander, Captain Stephen Slattery directed fire to both sides, with the heaviest directed towards the west. Colonel Lewane ordered Troop C to hold at that position while Troop B pulled out and moved back along Route 13 to Checkpoint 1. Under the intensified fire, the official battle narrative notes, "VC could be seen jumping around but didn't appear to be withdrawing."

Meanwhile, Troop B returned to Checkpoint 1. The troopers took about 40 minutes to rearm and move their wounded and dead to the evacuation landing zone to the south. Leaving a platoon at the checkpoint, the troop then moved to the west along Route 17 and established a blocking position along a likely Viet Cong withdrawal route.

At this point Troop C's 3rd Platoon, still at Checkpoint 1, moved to join the rest of the troop. C Company was loaded in the 3rd Platoon's APCs and moved north with the platoon as part of what might be called a counterattack force.

As 3rd Platoon then deployed west of the highway while the 2nd Platoon deployed to the east, the 3rd Platoon soon ran into a Viet Cong strongpoint, and a number of the platoon, including its commander, Lieutenant Charles Cole, were wounded. The platoon pulled back to the highway. At about the same time, other elements of the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry, began to arrive via helicopter at Landing Zone 2 (in the middle of the rice paddy west of Route 13 and a bit north of where the 3rd Platoon ran into the enemy, at this point the Viet Cong began to withdraw to the west.

For the most part, the 1/4th's active role in the engagement ended here. Troop C would soon form a perimeter along Route 13 where it had been ambushed, while Troop B, still to the west on Route 17 and supported by an ARVN unit, would extend its blocking position a little farther west. And C/2/18 would rejoin the battalion. Now the infantry became the major actor.

Although B Company had been designated as the rapid-reaction force, A Company arrived on the scene first. This was because when B Company was supposed to reinforce the engaged armored cavalry squadron all helicopters were busy. Consequently the infantry men began moving from Quan Loi by truck. Meanwhile A Company, under orders to move if helicopters became available, made its way to the airfield at Quan Loi. Because of the intensity of the combat, Division Commander DePuy then decided to divert 12 helicopters from other work near Song Be to airlift A Company to Landing Zone 2 in the battle area. Shortly afterwards, B Company's convoy, having arrived south of the battle area at a helicopter pickup zone, also was airlifted onto Landing Zone 2. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Herbert McChrystal, landed and took command of the two companies. His plan, as developed by Colonel Lewane, the overall American ground commander in the engagement, was to pursue and attack the retreating Viet Cong to the south and southwest.

B Company began its move to the south almost parallel to Route 13 on the west side. About 300 meters south of the landing zone it ran into C/2/18 and Troop C/1/4. Colonel McChrystal assumed command of both units—he ordered C Company to search the immediate area, and Troop C to reorganize, establish a perimeter to the area of the original ambush on Route 13, and from there to support Company B if the need arose.

Company B pushed on and after moving another 500 meters it became clear that the company had lost contact with the Viet Cong. But A Company was following the Viet Cong along a creek running southwest from the landing zone and soon ran into stiff resistance. The enemy was ensconced in a strong line on both sides of the creek. No headway was made, so C Company was called in to reinforce on A Company's right flank. This was enough to turn the tide and at approximately 4:15 p.m. a combined assault overran the enemy. Later it became known that the remainder had withdrawn to the west and northwest. In any case, contact was lost and the brigade commander, Colonel Sidney Berry, ordered the battalion to assemble at the landing zone. He designated it the brigade reserve and the men dug in for the night.

M-113s were good, reliable transport, but vulnerable to mines and rockets. Caught in an ambush, troops who had ridden topside abandon ship and hit the dirt, save for one stalwart gunner providing fire support at his shielded ".50" mount.

During the day as the battle developed, various other 1st Infantry Division and ARVN units had been deployed as blocking and pursuing forces. However, the enemy, for the moment at least, had slipped through the net. Contact waned considerably by mid-afternoon, and by 5 p.m. all action had ceased.

Throughout the day fire support was continuous, complete, and effective. Colonel Lewane directed that the Air Force, for the most part, expend its ordnance to the west of Route 13, while divisional artillery, helicopter gunships, and AC-47s concentrated mostly, but not exclusively, on the east side of Route 13.

When the Viet Cong began withdrawing, artillery attempted to block their escape. The 88 USAF sorties dropped slightly more than 100 tons of high explosives, napalm and CBUs, plus they fired 160 rockets. General DePuy was especially grateful for the air support and, with perhaps some overstatement, said later that the Air Force people ". . . pulled it out for us." The 8-inch and 155mm batteries expended 277 and 548 rounds, respectively. This fire support, when added to the fire of the two directly engaged units—the 1/4 Cavalry and the 2/18 Infantry—brought about devastating results. By body count, 270 enemy soldiers were killed that day, 300 more by estimate. American units, on the other hand, suffered relatively light casualties—about 20 killed in action and about 100 wounded.

DePuy was convinced that the enemy, through his intelligence network, knew that the American convoy was coming and had prepared accordingly. Nonetheless, even given the

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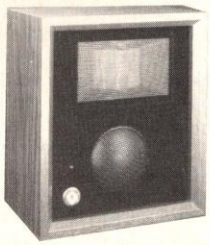

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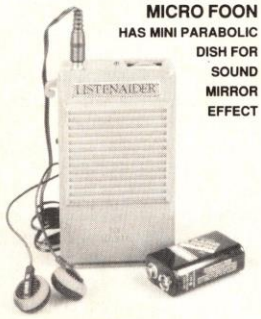

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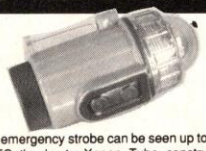

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Although the Viet Cong retained their ability to strike and disengage at will, the Americans proved themselves able to keep their casualties down by skillful use of armor and to give a swift response by calling in combined supportive firepower. Although the VC attack at Ap Tau O was well planned, their strung-out positions gave them inferior communications and response flexibility compared to the U.S. forces.

surprise, American commanders were pleased with the results of the battle. To DePuy and his staff, these actions were particularly gratifying when compared with the performance of June 8. First, "the coordination of fire support was vastly improved;" second, "the cavalry maneuvered during the battle" and did not remain in a static defensive position; and third, "the battlefield relief force arrived in time to engage the VC prior to withdrawal." On all three counts the division's performance had been far from perfect on the earlier date.

In both VC ambush engagements, as in all others during the El Paso II campaign, Americans claimed to have "decisively defeated" the enemy. "VC casualties," stated the division after-action report, "in the battles of June 30 and July 2 were significantly higher than on June 8." The premise that high enemy casualties equaled victory had not yet been called into question.

Perhaps more important than claims of victory, though, was the very real, albeit prosaic, fact that an American division was learning how to deal with Viet Cong ambushes, putting into effect the lessons of the earlier battle, and doing better all the time. An Army study in early 1967 on the efficacy of armor tactics, techniques and operations in Vietnam concluded that, "It is doubtful that any unit other than the [armored] cavalry squadron available to the brigade commander could have withstood the shock of the VC-initiated action, reacted with equal fury, or achieved such gratifying results by reconnaissance in force."

The army clearly had no doubt as to the utility of armored cavalry in fighting the Viet Cong.

Despite such official optimism, a few nagging questions remained. To what degree did this battle, and that of Ap Tau O, represent the division taking the war to the enemy and inflicting heavy damage on him? Had this been a major or a minor contribution to the American strategy of attrition? And, to turn the question around, to what degree did these engagements represent the Viet Cong taking the war to the Americans? After all, who ambushed whom? The enemy, we should never forget, had his own action agenda, based on a strategy of attrition against American armed forces. In both ambush engagements, the enemy held the battlefield initiative—i.e., he started the engagement, and he decided when to end it. His capacity to withdraw almost at will left the Americans with the same problem as before—drawing the enemy into battle and convincing, or forcing, him to stand and fight sufficiently long to be substantially punished. And yet the same enemy paid the higher price in the action—much higher. Such was the disturbing enigma of Vietnam, never quite resolved for the visiting U.S. forces. □

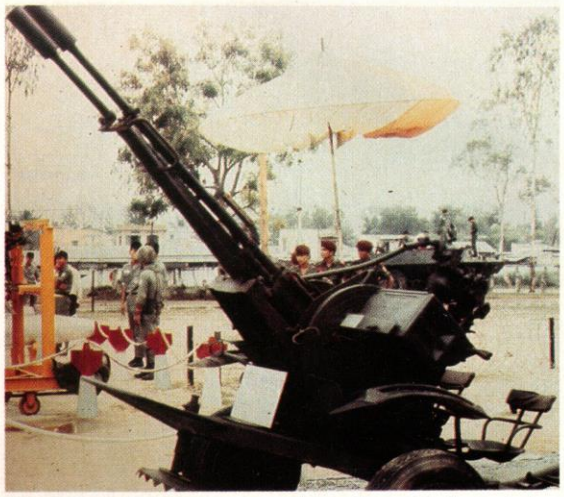
John M. Carland has published articles on British Imperial and American military history. He is currently writing a history of the U.S. Army ground operations in Vietnam, 1965-66.

The one-two punch the Quad and Duster provided in Vietnam was an adaptation from World War II.

By Charles E. Kirkpatrick

"They're the best way," the young drill sergeant finally allowed, "to move 20 meters of jungle back 30 meters." He paused. "They're noisy bastards, too, but when Charlie hears 'em coming, he usually goes the other way."

The conversation, variations of which could be heard at Fort Polk, or Fort Jackson, or Fort Ord in the 1960s, was played out on the back steps of a barracks at Harmony Church, to the accompanying whine of Fort Benning's mosquitoes. The day's training over, the evening rituals of the training brigade had been observed: the pizza truck had come and gone, and the gaggle of boys wanting to shine boots had finally moved off into some other platoon's area. Tired trainees were spending the few free minutes of their day listening while an only slightly older combat veteran regaled them with tales of Vietnam and the elusive enemy. That night, he told them of "Quads and Dusters," another bit of the folklore of Vietnam.



The twin 40mm Bofors gun would have been of little use had the Communists ever attacked by air, but mounted on vehicles it provided excellent ground fire support.

In a war that saw the use of "smart" bombs and super-sophisticated intelligence-gathering technology, Quads and Dusters were about as high-tech as a stone hatchet. They were the obsolete products of World War II demands for a way to protect infantry and tanks from enemy tactical airpower. Quads were machine guns—quadruple .50-caliber guns in an M-45 power turret mounted on a towed, two-wheel carriage. The air defense artillery manuals designated the whole package the M-55, but hardly anyone knew it as anything but the "Quad" or "Quad-50"—or, more dramatically, the "Whispering Death." During World War II, ordnance mechanics mounted Quads on everything from a towed trailer to a half-tracked infantry carrier.

The other half of the highly favored pair was the Duster—the M-42 gun carriage, an antiaircraft system that mounted two 40mm Bofors weapons in an open gun tub. In their day, both had been reasonably effective low-altitude antiaircraft weapons, but the steady progress of aircraft technology had left both weapons far behind, and the Army had relegated them to the National Guard. In Vietnam, however, ground commanders soon rediscovered their enormous firepower.

The M-55 "Quad" was based on the Browning M-2 heavy machine gun, a simple and rugged weapon conceived in 1917 to provide reliable heavy firepower for the infantry—a gun also that was eventually to be found on virtually every armored vehicle the Army took to battle in World War II. The Air Force used the Browning to arm fighters as late as the Korean War, and it became famous as the defensive armament on the B-17 Flying Fortress and B-24 Liberator bombers. By the time Americans were fighting in Vietnam, Browning and its subsidiaries had manufactured more than a million and a half of the .50-caliber guns. Despite the gun's age, Browning's basic design never became outmoded.

The four machine guns in the Quad's power turret each consumed ammunition at the rate of 800 rounds per minute, spewing out a maximum of 3,200 bullets to an effective range of about 1,000 yards. The effective rate of fire was lower, but even at 1,000 to 1,500 rounds per minute, the Quad in action was a fearsome sight. Soldiers in World War II learned that it could literally suck the life out of a hillside at ranges up to half a mile. During the Korean War, Quad-50s were used for direct fire support during attacks and final protective fires during defense. The gun's debut in Vietnam was in the hands of the French, who used a pair of them with considerable effect during the battle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

The Duster evolved from the towed 40mm antiaircraft gun of the Second World War. The standard Bofors was an effective weapon, but armored divisions needed a gun that could keep up with their rapid advance and move cross-country with the tanks. The solution was to mount a pair of 40mm guns on the M-24 light tank chassis, and divisions began to receive limited numbers of the resulting M-19 self-propelled antiaircraft gun in 1944. The twin 40s also gave excellent service during the Korean War, but by 1951 the M-19s were rapidly wearing out. Thus the Army contracted for a replacement that used the M-41 "Walker Bulldog" tank chassis and the power turret developed for the M-19. After standardizing the design in 1953, the Army ordered more than 3,700 of the gun that everyone came to know as the "Duster."

Similar in many ways, the M-19 and M-42 most visibly differed in the placement of the turret. The M-19 moved the engine forward in the hull and put the turret at the rear of the vehicle. The M-42 kept the turret roughly centered on the hull.

The Duster's Bofors 40mm guns had been well tried by both sides in World

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The photograph was taken by former U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Howard (Harry) C. Breedlove, while on combat helicopter assault operations with the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) near Duc Pho during **Operation Oregon** on April 24, 1967. Featured are members of Recon Platoon dispatched from U H 1 D Helicopter hovering above the ridge line. In addition to being featured in many publications, this prize winning photograph was selected by the 98th Congress, on January 23, 1984, to be minted by the U.S. Mint for the design on the Vietnam Veterans National Medal.

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War II. Loaded with four round clips, the guns could fire at a rate up to 240 rounds per minute to a theoretical extreme range of 9,000 meters. All 40mm ammunition was tracer, however, and the system was designed primarily for direct fire on pinpoint targets at ranges of approximately 2,000 meters, where the gunner could see the strike of the rounds. The two-pound HEIT projectile used in Vietnam was point-detonating and designed to self-destruct at 3,500 meters.

Once recovered from the National Guard, the old antiaircraft weapons went to Vietnam by the battalion. Starting in the fall of 1966, the U.S. Army deployed three battalions of Dusters to the Republic of Vietnam, each battalion consisting of a headquarters battery and four Duster batteries, and each augmented by one attached Quad-50 battery and an artillery searchlight battery. The 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery, with attached Battery G, 65th Artillery (M-55), and Battery G, 29th Artillery (Searchlight), supported the 3rd Marine Division in northern I Corps area. Based at Dong Ha and Da Nang, 1/44 operated from Phu Bai in the south to Con Thien in the north and Khe Sanh in the west.

The 5th Battalion, 2nd Artillery, with attached Battery D, 71st Artillery (M-55), and Battery I, 29th Artillery (Searchlight), was assigned to II Field Force Artillery at Long Binh. The 4th Battalion, 60th Artillery, with attached Battery E, 41st Artillery (M-55), and Battery B, 29th Artillery (Searchlight), belonged to the 41st Artillery Group of I Field Force Artillery and operated out of Qui Nhon, An Khe and Tuy Hoa. A separate Quad unit, Battery G of the 55th Artillery, was assigned to the Americal Division at Chu Lai. Finally, Battery H of the 29th Artillery (Searchlight), supported operations of the 9th Infantry Division.

Each of the Air Defense battalions had over a thousand men, but the units never fought as batteries, much less as battalions. Demands for fire support far outstripped availability of weapons, and individual fire units were quickly scattered throughout the battalions' areas of responsibility. Each Duster battery had two firing platoons, both of which could be employed independently, as could the six firing sections of each machine-gun battery. As a result, the war fought by the Air Defense gunners in Vietnam was overwhelmingly a sergeant's war, as detached platoons and firing sections found themselves under the operational control of other types of units. Normal missions for the automatic weapons included convoy security, perimeter defense, and fire support for maneuver operations. Quads and Dusters were not equally appropriate for every task, however, and the technical limitations of the systems deter-

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mined the uses to which ground commanders could put them.

The most important limitation was that M-55s and M-42s were old pieces of equipment that needed a lot of maintenance and required hard-to-get spare parts. The gasoline-powered Dusters were particularly susceptible to fires in the engine compartment. Thus, despite its cross-country capability, it was not wise to use the Duster in extended search and destroy operations in heavy jungle terrain because of excessive wear on engines, transmissions and suspensions.

On the plus side, the Duster was essentially a fairly simple piece of machinery on which the crews could perform maintenance. Better yet, the Duster's high ground clearance and excellent suspension-system design gave it an ability to withstand land mine explosions with minimal crew casualties. By 1969, American soldiers had discovered that they could also load the Duster on a landing craft, mechanized (LCM), and use it to reach previously inaccessible shore lines, bays and remote river areas.

In contrast to the Duster, the M-55 was a much lighter piece of equipment. The trailer on which the turret was mounted had a fixed axle, however, and could not be towed at highway speeds. Consequently, the battalions usually mounted the M-55 on deuce-and-a-half trucks. In that configuration, however, the gun was restricted to roads. Generally speaking, then, Quads could not go cross-country in support of maneuver units. But in operations away from established road nets where heavy machine-gun support was needed, it was possible to slingload the Quad with the CH-47 helicopter.

The second major limitation had to do with ammunition. Although the Duster's 40mm shell had a terrific blast and fragmentation effect, it also had a highly sensitive point-detonating fuse that limited effectiveness in heavy vegetation. Under those conditions, the better weapon was the Quad, because the heavy .50-caliber projectile could easily punch through cover that would detonate the Duster's 40mm shell too early for it to be effective. At longer ranges, however, the 40mm shell was far more useful, particularly against field fortifications. The Duster also was able to deliver indirect fires by using data from field artillery fire-direction centers.

Eventually, the enemy learned the range at which 40mm rounds self-destructed and began to set up mortar, recoilless-rifle and rocket positions just outside that range. During the siege of Ben Het in June 1969, Duster crews countered that tactic by using new ammunition. They loaded one gun with regular and one gun with long-range am-

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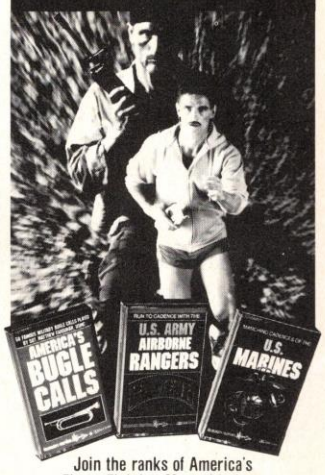

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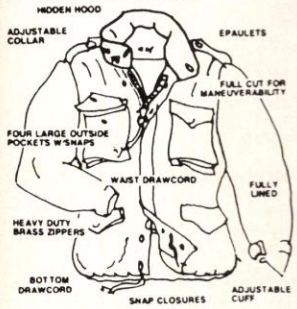

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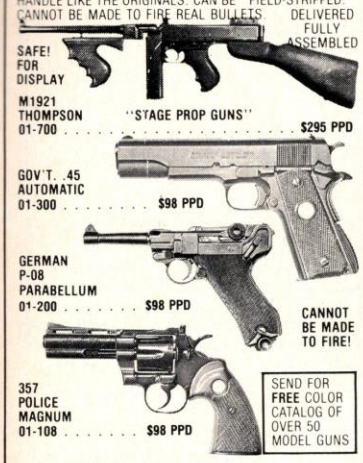

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munition. Upon observing the flashes of enemy fire, the crew began its direct fire adjustment with the regular ammunition, giving the enemy a false sense of security during the adjusting period. Then they switched to the long-range ammunition and laid fire directly on the enemy positions, obtaining immediate and numerous secondary explosions.

Both weapons served well in perimeter defenses, where gunners could establish clear fields of fire and alternate firing positions. It was there that the AN/MSS-3 (23-inch) and the newer AN/TVS-3 (30-inch) searchlights were most useful, too. At night the searchlights swept the perimeter in the infrared mode, so as to detect the enemy without disclosing their positions. Having found the enemy, gunners switched to visible light mode for target illumination and engagement. Quads and Dusters were quickly on target because the men routinely laid searchlight azimuth indicators parallel with the automatic weapons. The other major use of searchlights was to bounce light from clouds to improve vision for friendly patrols and nearby positions using starlight scopes.

Soldiers of the 1/44th Artillery and their Marine counterparts in I Corps set the pattern of Quad and Duster operations. Because of an early scarcity of armored-combat vehicles, M-42s were first used as armor. Often thankful men quickly learned the value of high volumes of 40mm and .50-caliber fire, both in the field and in perimeter defenses. Quads beefed up the defenses of remote fire bases, while Dusters accompanied both supply and tactical convoys along contested highways to break up ambushes. Dusters of Battery C, 1/44th Artillery, led the task force of Operation Pegasus that broke the siege of Khe Sanh in April 1968. Dusters and Quads provided critical final-protective fires throughout Vietnam during the Tet offensive and later took part in Operation Lam Son 719. Wherever fire support was needed, M-42s and M-55s could be found.

Toward the end of the war in Vietnam, the Army scheduled both aging weapons for replacement with the XM163 Vulcan 20mm antiaircraft gun and actually tested a Vulcan combat team of five vehicles during the winter of 1968-69. Long before production caught up with demand, however, the phased reduction of U.S. troop strength in Vietnam made that replacement unnecessary. Automatic-weapons units began to stand down early in 1971 and had left Vietnam completely by mid-1972. By that time, the Quad and three Duster battalions sent to Vietnam had fired well over four million 40mm rounds and 10 million .50-caliber rounds in support of American, Vietnamese and Allied forces. □

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BASES & INSTALLATIONS

Continued from page 17

tunnels were in the area, human and canine tunnel experts, sensor devices, smoke generators, anti-tunnel weapons and flooding machines were used to completely scour the ground beneath Cu Chi. In a matter of months, all the tunnels underneath the base camp were flushed out.

While most of the tunnels were destroyed, a few were deliberately left intact. These were used as part of a division tunnel-fighting school that became famous throughout Vietnam with a number of command-wide seminars and courses taught there. Volunteer "tunnel rats" and engineers from Allied contingents throughout Vietnam trained in these tunnels. After the war, some communist propagandists claimed that they lived in tunnels right under the American base camp but, according to the Army Center of Military History, the claim is extremely doubtful. If those tunnels are indeed located within the old Cu Chi perimeter, then the communists are simply showing visitors the old 25th Infantry Division tunnel school!

During the course of the war, meanwhile, the Cu Chi base camp became increasingly more sophisticated. Paved streets and parking lots took the place of narrow dirt lanes and fields. Mobile electronic computer vans were moved into the camp and used for routine administrative management. Many building interiors began to look like stateside offices, complete with automatic data processors and other modern equipment. Huge hangars and aircraft maintenance shops were established. Large power plants and electrical facilities were linked into depots and warehouses. Sections of the base became specialized in airframe construction or electronics. The management of Cu Chi base itself became a big job and by 1970, the base camp was so large and complex that it looked, at first glance, like any normal Army post in the United States.

In late 1970, the 25th Infantry Division began preparing to depart from Vietnam and return to Hawaii. As a base inventory was conducted and some items were taken out, the U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam decided that the post was so large and safe that it should be turned over intact to the South Vietnamese. In December 1970, Cu Chi was signed over to the South Vietnamese 25th Infantry Division and became a major installation for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Less than five years later, Cu Chi was surrendered to contingents of the victorious North Vietnamese Army. □

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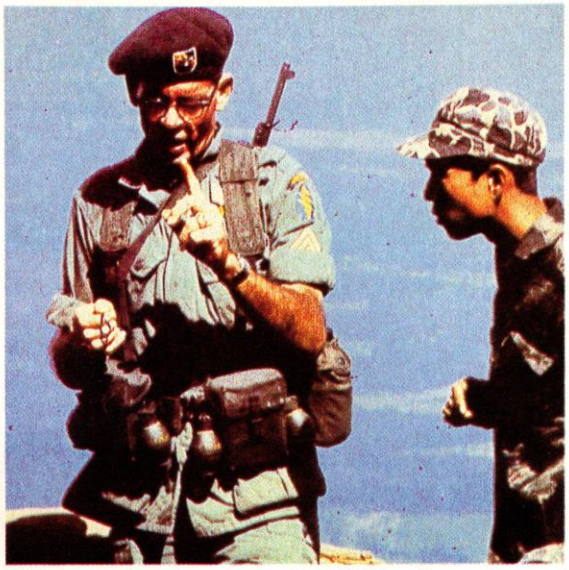
Time provides a new perspective for the "other war" in Vietnam—the American advisory effort, start to finish.

By Alexander S. Cochran, Jr.

As the events of the "Second Indochina War" now become somewhat distant and its analysis is turned over to historians rather than participants or political scientists, it becomes increasingly obvious that the conflict was a civil war—a brutal war of attrition between peoples of a common culture and society as to who would control their future. It is instructive to remember not only how it began, but also how it ended—a conflict among the Vietnamese themselves. The American participation is best seen in that context.

Fortunately for historians and students of the Vietnam War, the U.S. Army Center of Military History has recognized that set of facts and incorporated the perspective that logically follows into the official *United States Army in Vietnam* historical series. The latest volume, Jeffrey J. Clarke's *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973*, focuses upon this same dimension, continuing the superb example established several years ago with Ronald H. Spector's critically acclaimed *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960*.



A Special Forces adviser instructs an ARVN soldier on the use of a grenade. South Vietnam's problems may have been more profound than the U.S. advisory effort could possibly remedy.

Clarke's focus in *The Final Years* is the American advisory effort in Vietnam, the so-called "other war," although, to the Vietnamese, there was only the one war. American popular and academic interest in the war, both at the time and even today, has been concerned mostly with the combat role. But such a view overlooks the enormous amount of time and resources spent by Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine, Coast Guard, State Department and CIA personnel in effort to guide and assist the South Vietnamese in winning their war by themselves. One should remember, as Clarke points out, that of the entire U.S. panoply in Vietnam, American advisers were the first in and the last out. As visitors to the Vietnam War Memorial can see for themselves, the first and last Americans killed in Vietnam were military advisers.

Clarke's coverage in his *Advise and Support: The Final Years* is both chronological and thematic. He sets the stage in a brief section, "Historical Perspective," which reviews the war's background through 1965, including U.S. and Vietnamese roles. He then moves through five chronological parts—"A New War (1965)," "Turmoil and Reform (1966-67)," "Reevaluating the Effort (1968)," "A New Direction (1969-1970)" and "Successes and Failures (1971-1973)." His interest is in the policy direction from Washington, how that was interpreted by both Americans and Vietnamese in Saigon, and how Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) attempted to implement that policy.

His focus necessarily deals with high-level considerations and involves presidents and generals from both countries, provinces and corps regions. Yet he also treats the actions of sergeants and lieutenants, districts and battalion sectors. Thus he can evoke a magnificent and eclectic vista of the "other war."

Thematically, he deals with a wide range of issues—military strategy; command and control; roles and missions; internal reform; logistics and training; external evaluation, and combat effectiveness. Events that receive particular attention include the South Vietnamese politico-military structure and key personalities; the 1965 controversy over a combined Allied command; problems with the Special Forces CIDG-Montagnard program; relationships between U.S. and Vietnamese strategy and combat operations; the 1966 rebellion in I Corps; the origins and implementation of the Vietnamization program; the "One War" campaigns, and the American efforts at reform of the South Vietnamese armed forces.

As his research, Clarke has examined a variety of sources, from participant memoirs and published accounts to MACV reports and official Army records. In presentation, he is scrupulously fair in assessment of his evidence and judiciously honest in his judgments. His style is both authoritative and refreshing, as he writes with confidence and flair, commodities that are all too rare in official histories.

His most powerful and insightful judgments come in his conclusion, appropriately entitled "Trojan Horses." Why did the 1965-1973 advisory effort fail so disastrously in 1975, he asks. The answers, he then suggests, lie in "the old intangibles of leadership, will and purpose." As he convincingly demonstrates, American military strategy, and MACV's implementation thereof, were well meant but flawed. Hence, the advisory effort was doomed from the start.

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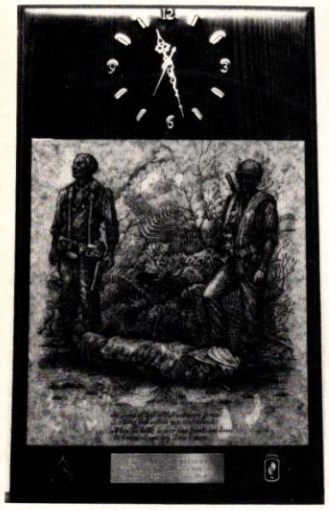

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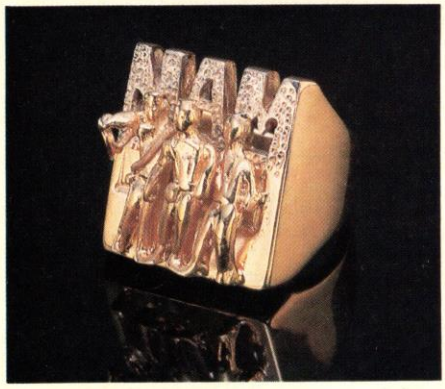

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Vietnamese desertion, or the systematic abuse of advisory evaluations, and definitely the American tendency to merely "shore up" the Vietnamese military institution sidestepped the refusal of Vietnamese political and military leaders to accept the urgency of social reform. Thus, Clarke concludes, "the American advisory effort in Vietnam was ultimately unsuccessful, and the military defeat of Saigon. . .was dramatic in its swiftness." A bitter-sweet judgment, to be sure.

For those involved with American participation in the "other war," or simply curious about it, Clarke's book can be regarded as authoritative in its facts and instructive in its message. For those seeking insights on why the South Vietnamese lost their war, *The Final Years* offers some tough answers.

Journal of a Combat Tanker, Vietnam 1969; *by Toby L. Brant; Vantage Press, 1988; $10.95*

Toby Brant's journal focuses on the time he spent as a gunner and tank commander on an M-48-A3 tank near Cu Chi in Vietnam in 1969. But this story of the months he spent with the 25th Infantry Division goes well beyond an account of what occurred in a limited time in one little place in a war two decades ago. This is a soldier's story of what war is like and much of it could have been written from the enlisted-man's view in almost any war.

He tells, for example, how the instinct for survival forces a man to adapt so he will stay alive.

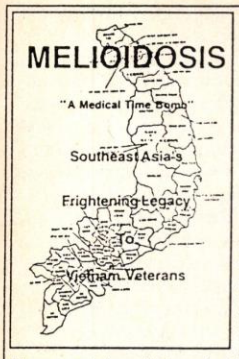
"It is really amazing," he writes, "how one's senses become attuned to every little sound. I'm a heavy sleeper, but in Vietnam I could be asleep and hear the grass move as someone walked by. Fear does that to you."

He also has a telling anecdote to illustrate the age-old tension between the leader and the led. It doesn't take soldiers long to sense inadequate leadership—and to take steps to protect themselves.

He tells how he found his new tank commander huddled down in the tank as it passed through Viet Cong territory, busily reading a training manual on the .50-caliber machine gun. Later that night, Brant saw the new sergeant sleeping deep down in the stifling interior of the tank. "I knew that the man was just plain scared to death," he writes. He told his lieutenant he would not go out with the sergeant again: "If it happened, I would have seriously considered killing him."

Brant was wounded twice in Vietnam. The second time, the explosion of a booby trap cost him both his legs. He is not a professional writer but he has done what few of the professionals can do: tell what war is really like.

Orr Kelly



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(signed) Carl A. Gnam, Jr.
Partner

□PERSONALITY□

Continued from page 8

Samaritan, a hospital ship bound for Iwo Jima, where, on D-Day plus six and seven, this woman from Shorewood watched and photographed as "dark little boats like beetles" shuttled 551 wounded Marines from the beach to the *Samaritan*.

Although denial of access to the front lines has been the correspondent's complaint since England's William Howard Russell covered the Crimean War in 1854, Dickey Chapelle was able to say that the Marines on Iwo Jima got her there. She hitched a ride from Guam on an evacuation plane, and two Marine officers gave her a truck ride to the front. She initially was disappointed at the lack of action. Only later did she learn that the "wasps" she heard buzzing around her head were Japanese rifle bullets.

She talked to the dying and wounded. One of them gave her his Kabar, a token that she subsequently carried to every battle front. She discovered that men in battle fought not for the folks back home but for the men around them. She wrote of courage, love, bravery and loyalty.

Unfortunately, her desire to see the battle lines on Okinawa was her undoing. Colonel Miller had told her she was not to go ashore until the nurses and Red Cross were there. Several days later she was tracked down by the embarrassed high command and shipped home, even though the Sixth Marine Division had been her willing host on Okinawa. Colonel John MacQueen, chief of the Division staff, would later write: "I was struck by what I might term an unusual person —rawboned, mannish, determined, and alert with a strong personality. Dressed in her helmet and fatigue clothing and loaded with her pack and correspondent kit she was an impressive figure." Chapelle had found the Marines so receptive, they would always be "her Marines."

Later in 1945, the war was over. Dickey Chapelle was back in New York working for *Seventeen*, disgusted because the editor said a proposed story about men at war was "too dirty."

Although she began to dress in sophisticated, expensive clothes and jewelry, mostly for Tony, her interests lay with the oppressed. Through an American Friends Service Committee worker she and Tony were asked to represent the Quakers in Europe.

Together, they would work up stories on Quaker relief efforts for fund-raising in the United States. The Chapelle team was soon incorporated as AVISO (American Voluntary Information Services Overseas). They traveled in Europe aboard the "Blue Angel," a truck fitted

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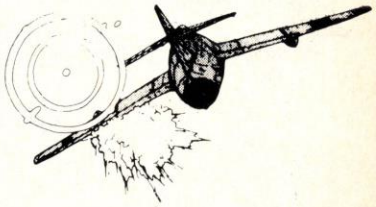

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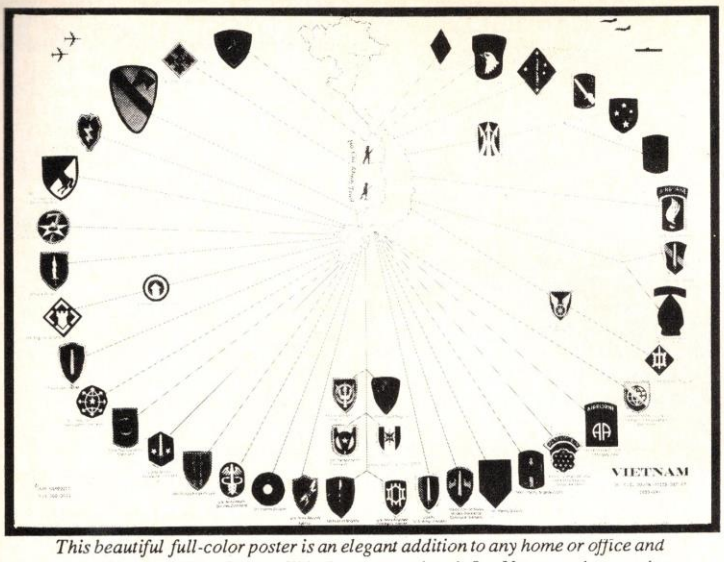

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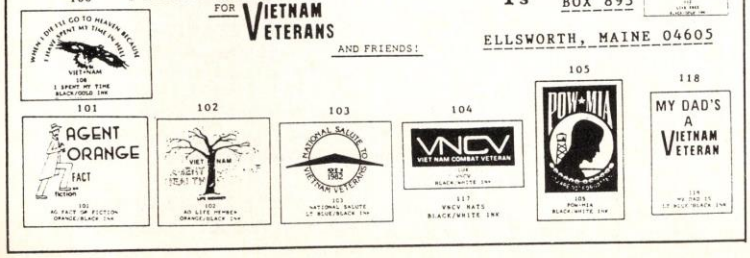

out for photography as well as sleeping. Later, they would cover a locust invasion in the Middle East and relief projects in India for various humanitarian organizations. Dickey's pictures and stories were always about people and how they coped with adverse circumstances. She believed that love and an indomitable human spirit could conquer nearly everything.

She discovered it took more than that to hold her marriage together. After 15 years, with some bitterness, she left Tony. Dickey now turned to her Marines.

First, she had to regain her accreditation with the armed services. That was easy, and next she was off to develop a story on Marine recruit training at Camp Pendleton, Calif. There, Bob Morissey, Public Information Officer, reported to his wife that he had to "honcho a woman reporter around boot camp." She would have to stay with the Morisseys. In spite of a small child, a dog and pregnancy, Mary Jane Morissey later said, within an hour of Dickey's being there, "I loved her." Their friendship lasted the rest of Chapelle's life. And it was Bob Morissey who would later arrange her tours with the Marines in Vietnam.

Chapelle's Marine stories again met with censorship and wrangling between source and publisher. She wasn't sure what her work really accomplished, but it changed a young woman who wanted to go as far as possible in the role of a war correspondent. The Marine assignment brought little money, and she was forced to give up free-lancing for a job in New York with the Research Institute of America. Its founder, Leo Cherne, also had founded the International Rescue Committee, whose purpose was to rescue refugees from oppression. Only a few months after she began the RIA job, she was asking for a leave of absence. Two weeks would do for a trip to Vienna representing a major magazine. She carried IRC penicillin for Hungarian refugees streaming across the Austrian border. It was November 1956—the Hungarian Revolution.

Chapelle asked for no advice. Advice always led to caveats. Typically, she joined two freedom fighters and walked across the Hungarian border with the IRC's penicillin.

The group was captured and taken to a Budapest prison. Thirty-eight days of solitary confinement taught her lessons in endurance and courage—and it etched in her mind an unassailable hatred of Communism and its followers.

In Indochina, the United States was replacing France as the principal foreign power in Vietnam. France had problems closer to home in Algeria. Again, where there was oppression there was Dickey Chapelle. Her background as a political prisoner brought her to Algerian free-

dom fighters. They needed true accounts from the villages and the desert where the French were successfully suppressing the news. The Algerians smuggled her in and out of the country like contraband. This time her photographs and stories of rebels and their peremptory justice for "traitors" were widely syndicated.

In the late 1950s, Chapelle covered the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the Marine landing in Lebanon. She was always looking for an opportunity to represent some prestigious publication, but none approached her. She won the coveted George Polk Award from the Overseas Press Club, but she could not get on a regular payroll.

To obtain a more reliable income, she began speaking on the lecture circuit in 1958, capturing her audiences with the same flamboyant style that would make her a controversial figure as she entered her "Vietnam period."

In addition to covering the Turkish Army on winter maneuvers on the Soviet border and obtaining an audience with Jordan's young King Hussein, she went to Cuba for the *Reader's Digest* to tell about the Castro Revolution's brave freedom fighters and their charismatic leader. But as Fidel Castro's Marxist orientation became more obvious, she returned the following year to reverse her stand. She then lived for a time in Miami with refugees preparing an attack on Castro's Cuba. She helped make bombs and wrote of keeping nitroglycerin in a refrigerator's lettuce tray. A near disaster ended that adventure. Chapelle went along in a motor launch headed for Cuba carrying arms, mostly homemade. Just off Miami the Coast Guard fired on the boat, exploding the ammunition on board. She escaped with minor burns.

By 1961, things were heating up in South Vietnam. The *Reader's Digest* asked Chapelle to cover Father Hoa, the "Fighting Priest" of Vietnam. He and his people were her kind of fighters. She lived in his village, came to know the people, shared food, clothing and her perfume with the women. This was her first taste of the guerrilla war in Vietnam, and Dickey was, by now, an expert on the subject.

Now involved in the Vietnam struggle, Chapelle could not restrain her partisanship. Her lectures became more bombastic. Dressed in heels, nylons and expensively tailored clothes, she might appear on stage with a captured Viet Cong flag. She would throw it on the floor and stomp on it as she warned complacent Americans of the Communist threat in Southeast Asia. Some of her listeners were appalled by her intensity, but she got their attention.

In 1961, Chapelle spent several weeks in Laos observing and trying unsuccess-

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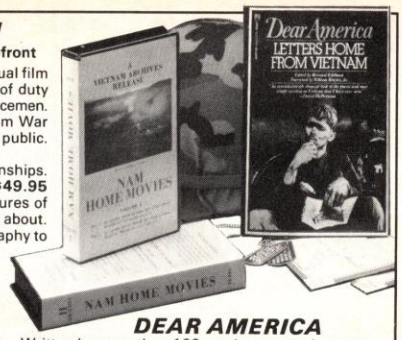

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fully to sell stories about the little-known war raging there. In 1961 and 1962 the U.S. press corps in Vietnam consisted of only a few reporters. They were mostly young, new to Asia and, on the whole, lacking in military background. Thus, a coup was in the making when, in 1962, the *National Geographic* asked Chapelle to cover the use of American helicopters in South Vietnam. She scored a real scoop with her story *Helicopters Over South Vietnam*. It was the first major article in any magazine in the United States that even hinted there was a real war going on.

Chapelle now began winning more awards, and her photos were widely used, even in State Department briefings. She was in Vietnam again in 1963 for *National Geographic* working on *The Water War in Vietnam* and also looking for another story on the Ho Chi Minh trail, her way once again impeded by a reluctant military bureaucracy.

By 1964, anti-war activists back home were beginning to stir up public sentiment against America's Vietnam involvement—Chapelle often used her lectures to refute them. She considered the struggle another part of the on-going fight against Communism.

Bob Morissey was now Public Information Officer for General Wallace Greene, Marine Corps Commandant, in Washington. While both men knew and respected Chapelle, they at first demurred at her request to do a series of stories on men training and leaving for Vietnam for the *National Observer*. But she obtained her accreditation, and General Greene gave her the Marine Corps emblem from his own uniform's lapel. He said that Chapelle, more than anything else, wanted to be a Marine.

She proudly pinned the emblem on her Australian campaign hat, tucked her hair up under it, and set off to accompany newly recruited Marines from Chicago to Okinawa and on to Vietnam. She wrote: "I wasn't just a middle-aged woman reporter. . .I was first an American citizen, and it felt very good."

It was late 1965, and on November 3, Chapelle joined U.S. Marines from DaNang on a routine sweep along the nearby Songtra Bong River in Operation Black Ferret. The next morning Chapelle was up early to accompany a scouting party. She was right behind the point man when he tripped a line setting off a Viet Cong booby trap. Her throat was pierced. She died on the medevac helicopter.

Her Australian hat had fallen aside. It still bore her Marine emblem, two pairs of earned paratrooper wings, and a sprig of flowers she had picked. This time Dickey Chapelle came home accompanied by a Marine Corps honor guard. □

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□FORCES□

Continued from page 10

Forest zone. The T70 Battalion also benefited from its sapper experts and other key personnel transferred from other Mekong Delta battalions. In the spring of 1964, both the T70 and T80 Battalions received marching orders to move into Tay Ninh Province northwest of Saigon. Once this journey was completed, the T70 Battalion became the 8th Battalion of the 273rd VC Regiment.

The 273rd VC Regiment officially became part of the 9th VC Division in January 1965. With the division responsible for controlling the provinces north of the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon, one of the most crucial Communist objectives in the region was the town of Song Be. This city was situated between Saigon and Cambodia, just north of the secret Communist base area of War Zone D. Communist units were being concentrated in War Zone D with the eventual mission of attacking Saigon itself. These units needed a clear, straight logistical pathway from Cambodia in order to receive ammunition, medical supplies and other essential logistical needs.

In the spring of 1965, the entire 9th VC Division was given the mission of storming Song Be and wiping out the allied units stationed there. The defense of Song Be was composed of a South Vietnamese ranger battalion, city garrison troops with their American advisory element, and an Army Special Forces control detachment. The attack on this city would be the first time in which all three of the Communist division regiments worked together. The 273rd VC Regiment moved carefully through War Zone C and reached positions outside Song Be in April.

The attack against Song Be began on May 10, 1965, with the 273rd given the mission of attacking the airfield and intercepting any South Vietnamese reinforcements. The other regiments were ordered to seize Song Be itself. The 273rd regimental soldiers moved toward the airfield but were hit in the open fields by dozens of Skyraider fighter-bombers and helicopters. Explosions and rocket fire tore through their ranks as the aircraft roared out of the overcast skies and sent napalm and cannon fire spewing across the landscape. Hundreds of the regiment's soldiers fell dead or wounded into the charred earth. The rest of the men scattered into the nearby woods. One platoon in the 7th Battalion lost all but four men.

The battle of Song Be was a failure. The Communist 9th Division managed to get into the town but was eventually forced out. The 273rd VC Regiment then

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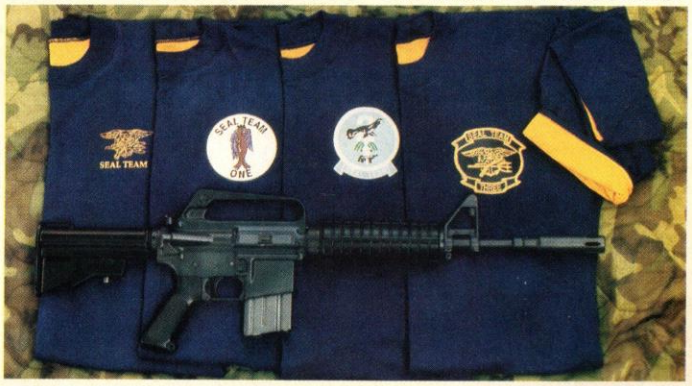

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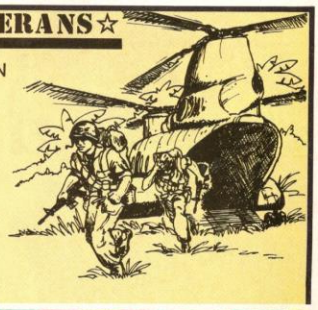

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retired to safer ground and received a small number of fresh replacements. A month later, the division was ordered into another attack. This time the division was given the mission of overrunning Dong Xoai, a U.S. Army Special Forces strongpoint south of Song Be. The Special Forces advisers and their South Vietnamese soldiers constituted a real threat to efforts in War Zone D.

On June 9, 1965, the 9th VC Division attacked Dong Xoai with one regiment. The other two regiments, including the 273rd, were deployed to intercept any Allied reinforcements trying to reach the town and its Special Forces compound. This time the 273rd did not suffer heavy casualties because the South Vietnamese never attempted to send their rescue units by road. Thanks to increased American aviation resources, the South Vietnamese were able to airlift their emergency reserves directly into combat. The helicopters simply flew over the regiment's ambush positions. As a result, the 273rd was not really engaged in this particular battle, although its sister 272nd VC Regiment was decimated by the Special Forces defenders.

Following the battle of Dong Xoai, the 273rd VC Regiment returned to a secret area near Bau Bang, north of Lai Khe and Saigon, for its first real opportunity to rest, receive new replacements and retrain. The rest period was cut short in November 1965 when Allied intelligence agents and Special Forces scouts found the VC in their hiding area. The regiment was reported just off National Route 13, and the U.S. 1st Infantry Division and ARVN 5th Division were called in to flush it out and destroy it. The Americans called this operation Bushmaster I.

The 1st Infantry Division found both the 271st and 273rd VC Regiments. Fierce combat erupted on the night of November 11-12, 1965, when the Communists attacked the positions of the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry. Both Viet Cong regiments charged out of the rubber trees on the west side of Highway 13. Helicopter gunships soon routed the attackers, however, and the regiment was forced to retreat. After six hours of fighting, the Viet Cong pulled back. The regiment reported its losses during the battle as 130 men killed and 58 men wounded.

The 273rd then withdrew to War Zone C and continued its rebuilding process through the rest of the year. At the beginning of 1966, now well-equipped and seasoned, the regiment was ready for battle and anxious to conduct another campaign against the South Vietnamese and their American allies. Another year in that long war, however, was nearly another war. . . another chapter yet to come for the 273rd and both friend and foe in Vietnam. □

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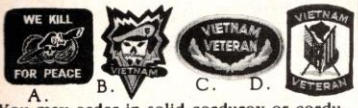

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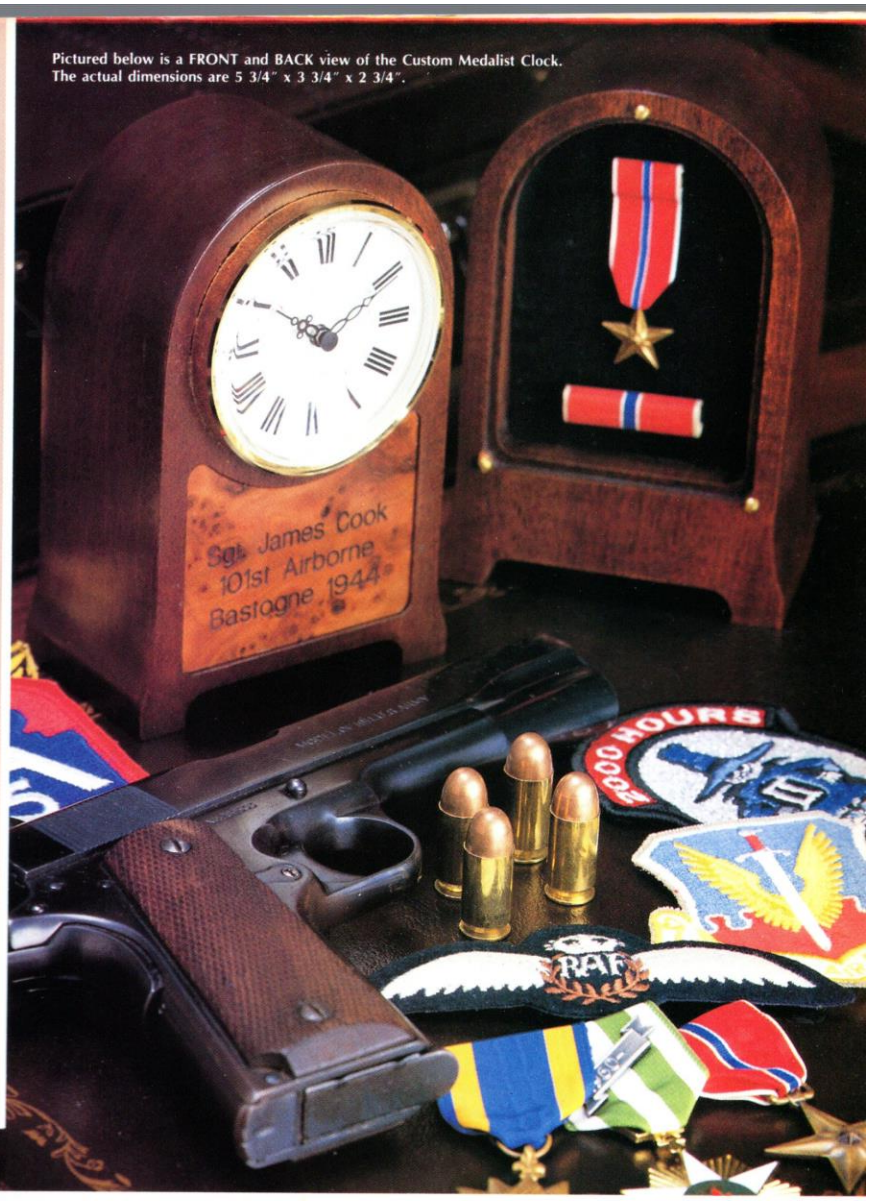
Pictured below is a FRONT and BACK view of the Custom Medalist Clock. The actual dimensions are 5 3/4" x 3 3/4" x 2 3/4".



CUSTOMIZATION INSTRUCTIONS

Personalization of Front Burl Inlay
Print or Type Clearly — Up To 20 Letters per line.

Line 1 _____
Name & Rank

Line 2 _____
Campaign, War, or Other

Line 3 _____
Country, Year or Other

MEDAL SELECTION

Base Price Includes 1 Medal & matching ribbon mounted in display case.
Check & Circle Medal to Be Mounted in Case.

ORDERING INSTRUCTIONS:

NAME _____ Phone ( ) _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ Zip _____
Method of Payment: ☐ Check ☐ Money Order ☐ VISA ☐ Mastercard
Card # _____ Exp. Date _____
Signature _____
ALLOW 6 to 8 weeks for Delivery
BASE PRICE (includes 1 medal & ribbon mounted) $79.95
Please specify medal to be mounted _____

SEND ORDER TO:
Leo Ferrell & Co., Inc.
Post Office Box 907339 Dept. SV2
Gainesville, Ga. 30501

additional medals at 9.95 each ____
Postage and Handling 5.00
Ga. Residents Add 5% sales tax ____
TOTAL . . . . . ____

"Remembrance"

Dedicated To The Over 58,000 Americans Who Gave Their Lives In Vietnam And The Monument That Honors Them.

World renown sculptor Ron Hinote has poured his love and talents into this moving tribute to the Vietnam Veteran. This highly detailed work of art is cast in genuine pewter and mounted on a richly finished hardwood base. The pewter plaque is engraved with the "Remembrance" title or may be ordered with the name of a friend or loved one, creating a personal and lasting memorial.

"Remembrance" is available in strictly limited quantities, exclusively through Heritage Marketing, Inc. To order, simply fill out the form below or call toll free.

With your purchase, a portion of the proceeds will be donated in your name to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and other Vietnam Veterans organizations.

ORDER FORM

Please enter my order for "Remembrance" by Ron Hinote. I have indicated the payment plan I desire and, if accepted, my piece will be shipped 6-8 weeks after receipt of payment in full. If not completely satisfied, I may return my purchase within 30 days for a full refund, less the cost of the personalized name plate.

PAYMENT OPTIONS

☐ Single payment.
☐ I have enclosed $50 for each piece ordered, please bill me for the balance in 2 equal monthly installments.

METHOD OF PAYMENT

☐ Check or Money Order enclosed. (No cash please.)
☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Acct. No.: _____

Exp. Date: _____

"Remembrance"	— $130.00	$ ____
Personalized Name Plate	— 5.50	$ ____
Shipping and handling	— 4.00	$ ____
MO Residents add tax	— $5.50	$ ____
TX Residents add tax	— $7.80	$ ____
TOTAL COST		$ ____

PERSONALIZED NAMEPLATE

Please engrave nameplate as follows:

_____

_____

_____

Signature

NOTE: Unless specified, your piece will be delivered with the "Remembrance" nameplate.

Send To: Heritage Marketing, Inc.
P.O. Box 165426
Irving, TX 75016

Order Toll Free: 1-800-752-7001 Ext 911